

NEGATIVITY AND MEDIATION IN  
ADORNO'S LITERARY AESTHETIC

BY

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An Margret, für den Sinn

It's just how you feel,  
When you know it's for real

-----Coca Cola jingle

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Theodor W. Adorno's theoretical work on aesthetics cannot be isolated from his other philosophical pursuits. Central to his philosophy was a commitment to the negative articulation of phenomena, a position that stemmed from his conviction that the liquidated citizen of the administered world was blinded by the manipulative apparatus of the culture industry and thus unable to express or perceive truth that was articulated positively. Only a noncommunicative language of resistance through dissonance could negatively express truth. Adorno looked to art as the model for such expression.

By focusing on the central concepts of negativity and mediation, I attempt to show why Adorno chose art as a potential repository for truth, a realm approaching freedom from domination. To do this, I examine Adorno's argument for artworks' unique ability to negate their origins, that is, how artworks produced by human labor out of material from the empirical world can distance themselves from mundane empirical objects. I point out that such distance is

accomplished through form, the artist's act of placing material into new and altered constellations. It is thus through form that the social and the aesthetic merge. Form is also the means to which Adorno turns to allow artists to mediate truth indirectly as a consequence of their attempts to employ the most advanced techniques at their disposal to solve formal problems: the artist's struggle with form is simultaneously an unconscious struggle to resolve social antagonisms. I also examine Adorno's related concern to suggest theoretically an indirect means for art reception that circumvents the misguided and conditioned impulses of the recipient by subordinating them to the objectivity of the artwork. Here again Adorno looks to form as the solution, specifically to the "modest" form of the critical essay.

While the main focus of the study is to explain how negativity as form allows for the mediation of truth and how the levels and degree of mediation show up in artworks, I also speculate about the link between Adorno's pessimism and the German Idealistic tradition and argue for the transferability of his aesthetic from music to literature.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: ADORNO'S NEGATIVE AESTHETIC

Theodor W. Adorno's work on modern aesthetics has found its most concise mottos in the slogans "negative aesthetics" or "negative dialectics," phrases revealing the central importance of negativity that, according to Adorno, characterizes the artwork's modus operandi. The concept of negativity in isolation, however, immediately begs numerous questions that are not confined to the field of aesthetics and could be equally valid concerning a negative function of any object: Negative in respect to what? What characterizes this negativity? Who perceives this negativity? Against what neutral (or perhaps positive) baseline does negativity become apparent? What types of reactions does negativity evoke? When placed in a scheme such as dialectics, the model in which negativity for Adorno played its significant role, negativity becomes somewhat more manageable, although each addition to the model brings with it increasingly complex problems of definition and interrelation. One addition, however, that cannot be avoided, if indeed a model of aesthetics is to emerge, is the aesthetic object, the work of art itself.

The more difficult aspects of this aesthetic model become apparent when we confront the issue of what stands juxtaposed to the work of art in Adorno's negative dialectics, for example, society, the perceiving subject, or perhaps other artworks that constitute the particular tradition. But these suggestions are too vague. If we begin with the notion of society as art's oppositional object, the

definition of society itself becomes a major stumbling block. While it may be tempting to single out ideology or false consciousness as that against which art reacts, even this remains too simple, as Adorno in various places implies, for it first demands that truth in society be discriminated from the ideological (and even these two elements may not stand in mutually exclusive opposition). Accomplished art does not consciously try to separate out truth from the untrue; such a conscious effort results in propagandistic or committed art that only continues the relationships of domination in society. Nevertheless, art can guide the way toward truth (which itself has various definitions). Indeed, in Adorno's system the very value of art lies in its potential truth content, although such truth does not display itself conspicuously, nor does it shine a bright light on the untruths of society. Rather art absorbs into itself society's contradictions, injustices, and antagonisms, although these are only virtually and tacitly expressed. It thus becomes the task of philosophy to define, discover, and articulate the truth that art embodies.

The point of departure is therefore the artwork whose truth must be excavated dialectically by the interaction between philosophical criticism and the artwork itself, a truth that only becomes possible as the result of a dialectical and adversary relationship between art and society. The numerous dialectical relationships involved in Adorno's aesthetic suggest that a thorough examination of negativity aesthetics necessitates identifying the complex interrelationships involved in Adorno's dialectical constellation.

The dialectical method itself that Adorno employs presupposes another important aspect: mediation. Adorno was emphatic about viewing the artwork as a man-made becoming, not a being. The nature of this becoming, if it is to depend on dialectical analysis to find its expression, must then also rely heavily

on the countless mediations that constitute these dialectics, especially if ascertaining art's truth content is to be a part of Adorno's aesthetics.

The major elements to be examined have thus been named: the artwork's unique ability to reflect truth, negativity, and mediation (with its implications for conceptual perception).

One of the difficulties in presenting such elements of Adorno's system lies in the danger that any chosen order suggests a type of logical progression from a basic and fundamental foundation up to the more important elements of the system. Such a perception, however, is misleading, since the elements of the system can scarcely be viewed in isolation from one another. Any notion of priority among the elements of this system of becoming also entangles one in the troublesome problem of origins and destinations. Adorno himself struggled with the problem of organization while writing Aesthetic Theory, as he wrote in two letters from which the editors of the text, Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, quote:

Interestingly the content of thoughts forces, for me, certain consequences onto the form. I knew and expected this all along, but now that it has happened I am dumbfounded all the same. This has to do simply with my theorem that there is no philosophical "first thing"; as a result of this, I cannot now construct my argument in the customary step-by-step fashion. Instead I have had to put together a whole from a series of partial complexes which are concentrically arranged and have the same weight and relevance. It is the constellation, not the succession one by one, of these partial complexes which has to yield the idea.

In another letter Adorno stated more concisely the unique organizational problems Aesthetic Theory presented:

The progression from first to second to third, and so on, which nearly always characterizes books--including my own, down to Negative Dialectics--is not feasible in the case of Aesthetic Theory. This book must be written concentrically such that the paratactical parts have

the same weight and are arranged around a center of gravity which they express through their constellation. (AT, p. 496, translation modified)<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while the bounds of writing dictate that I take up the components of Adorno's aesthetic theory one by one, I do so with the recognition that any such analytical approach is bound to imply what can only be an artificial order of presentation and development. As a result of this problem, I will in many ways repeat the circularity of Adorno. As new sections and chapters yield greater depth of information, I will at times circle back to reassess previously treated topics.

Because of the great circularity of Adorno's aesthetics, one could probably begin a discussion almost anywhere. The topic I chose to open the work in Chapter II is that of the artwork's relationship to truth, since the recognition of truth is such a crucial aspect of Adorno's philosophical and theoretical efforts. In this chapter I attempt to show how artworks that emerge through human labor from the imperfect empirical world can nevertheless function as repositories for truth by negating these origins. Important in this transformation, however, is the role art's illusory qualities play: since art cannot completely free itself from the tainted empirical world, its only hope is to simulate a realm free of domination through Schein or appearance. By relying on appearance art must plead guilty to the charge of mendacity, but Adorno argues that such appearance must still be saved if we are to retain a glimpse, no matter how imperfect, of a world free of domination. I also address in this chapter charges of elitism that have been leveled against Adorno over the years and some of the reasons for them.

Chapter III on negativity traces through some of the historical background of this important concept, through Hegel and Marx up to Adorno. Adorno, by

viewing the work of art as a determinate negation of society, finds in the determinate negation the means to bring together philosophy and aesthetics. As determinate negation, works of art are by definition critical of society, but because of their negativity they refuse to articulate solutions to social problems positively. Adorno's commitment to negativity has to do with his conviction that the world is too blinded and human subjects too liquidated to allow them to express truth positively. The key is thus resistance, noncommunication, in short negativity (Adorno points to the Jewish theological "ban on images" [Bilder-verbot] that forbade assigning fixed attributes to God as a model of such negativity). Because he did not abandon the notion of art as representation, Adorno upholds negativity by having art reflect not anything that exists in the empirical world but rather the "beauty of nature in itself" (das Naturschöne an sich) which stands for a state of reconciliation. In the chapter I also examine the consequences of what at times seems to be two competing models of negativity in Adorno. I close the chapter with a look at Adorno's notion of communication from an Iserian perspective.

In Chapter IV I explore the concept of mediation, a notion that traditionally makes comparisons in Marxist analyses of diverse phenomena possible by transcoding them into common denominators. In Adorno's aesthetics, form and formal concerns appear to be the way in which such transcoding takes place and through which the social and the aesthetic merge. Adorno describes the activity of the artist as a struggle to solve problems of form that the material presents. Because the material, however, contains within itself the antagonisms of the society from which it derived, the artist's preoccupation with form presupposes an unconscious but simultaneous struggle with society. To Adorno it is crucial that the social truth content enter art in this unconscious way since the artist

is not immune to the blindness that afflicts the rest of the world. For this reason Adorno rejects art that is overtly committed to political change.

Mediation is not to be found in a third realm between that artwork and the artist or the recipient, but rather within the artwork itself. To present some of the complex aspects of mediation I look in some detail at how Adorno describes the act of artistic production as well as the distinctions he makes between aesthetic and empirical objects. In a section on the "Hunger for Wholeness" I also look to the German Idealist tradition for clues as to why Adorno was so convinced of the world's dismal state.

In Chapter V I examine reasons why Adorno believed questions of art reception to be essential but practically impossible to resolve. These reservations have to do with his view that the subject was too conditioned by the manipulative apparatus of the culture industry for studies of reception to contribute much toward determining the "objective" value of an artwork. Adorno's strategy to deal with this problem is quite similar to that employed in the area of artistic production: he turns to form as a means to suppress the subjective and distorting impulses of the recipient. In taking this position Adorno collides head-on with Hans Robert Jauss's theory of Rezeptionästhetik. I thus close the chapter with a brief discussion of the Adorno-Jauss dispute.

Chapter VI provides a more detailed discussion of how Adorno turns to form, specifically to the critical essay, to insure that the subject is not allowed free rein in the act of criticism. By demanding that the subject subordinate his subjective impulses to the objective artwork Adorno hopes to circumvent through form the blinded perceptions of the critic. This means that the subject can only experience the artwork indirectly, since both the production and the reception of art are highly mediated. However, in writing an essay the critic produces a

construct that, because of qualities it shares with the artwork, can approach immediacy--an immediacy based on commonality of form between the artwork and the critical essay. To provide a few practical examples of Adorno's own literary critical practice, I examine Adorno's essays on Eichendorff and Beckett from Noten zur Literatur to show how Adorno can derive his aesthetic program from quite diverse literary works.

In my closing remarks in Chapter VII I examine the importance of form in the relationship between negativity and mediation, and discuss Adorno's conception of a language that resists domination. Based on these linguistic attributes I show that it is not difficult to translate Adorno's aesthetic theory from musical to literary phenomena, since both media can to various degrees resist dominating objects by striving for dissonance and noncommunication. I close with a brief discussion of critics, especially Jean-François Lyotard, who chided Adorno for refusing to abandon the traditional Western philosophical view of art as representation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, trans. C. Lenhardt, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 496, translation modified; all subsequent English citations from Aesthetic Theory are, unless otherwise stated, from this translation with the abbreviation AT and the corresponding page number given in parentheses. Modifications to this translation, when necessary, will also be noted. The original German of each quotation will appear in endnotes, cited from Asthetische Theorie, Vol. XII of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1970) and abbreviated as AT. "Interessant ist, daß sich mir bei der Arbeit aus dem Inhalt der Gedanken gewisse Konsequenzen für die Form aufdrängen, die ich längst erwartete, aber die mich nun doch überraschen. Es handelt sich ganz einfach darum, daß aus meinem Theorem, daß es philosophisch nichts 'Erstes' gibt, nun auch folgt, daß man nicht einen argumentativen Zusammenhang in der üblichen Stufenfolge aufbauen kann, sondern daß man das Ganze aus einer Reihe von Teilkomplexen montieren muß, die gleichsam gleichgewichtig sind und konzentrisch angeordnet, auf gleicher Stufe; deren Konstellation, nicht die Folge, muß die Idee ergeben" (AT, p. 541).

<sup>2</sup> ". . . die einem Buch fast unabdingbare Folge des Erst-Nachher [erweist] sich mit der Sache als so unverträglich, daß deswegen eine Disposition im traditionellen Sinn, wie ich sie bis jetzt noch verfolgt habe (auch in der 'Negativen Dialektik' verfolgte), sich als undurchführbar erweist. Das Buch muß gleichsam konzentrisch in gleichgewichtigen, parataktischen Teilen geschrieben werden, die um einen Mittelpunkt angeordnet sind, den sie durch ihre Konstellation ausdrücken" (AT, p. 541).

## CHAPTER II

### THE WORK OF ART AND TRUTH

Adorno's interest in works of art stemmed not only from aesthetic but also from philosophical considerations. Although Adorno was a noted musicologist who devoted a large proportion of his work to analyses of art, these studies cannot be bracketed out of his political and philosophical interests: art played a role in his entire philosophical system, not just in his aesthetics. In fact in Adorno's view, art criticism and social criticism cannot really be separated.

To provide for this close connection between art and society, aesthetics and philosophy, Adorno turned to the important term of truth content, which for him was the bridge that combined the social and the aesthetic. "In truth content, or its absence, aesthetic and social criticism fall together or coincide [zusammen-fallen]" (Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie, p. 417, my translation).<sup>1</sup> The unique qualities of artworks, in Adorno's view, offer the world a potential repository for truth that is not to be found anywhere else. We therefore begin our consideration of Adorno with a look at the link between art and truth. Toward this end, we will first discuss how art can negate its material, tainted origins, a necessary step if art is to convey truth. This negation, however, is inevitably somewhat delusive, since art cannot completely escape from the origins it tries to negate. For this reason, art's truth depends on art's illusory character which Adorno believes should be sustained. We will thus consider how this dependency makes art vulnerable to the charge of being ideological; as we shall see,

however, Adorno sees no way of preventing art from being either ideological or even a commodity, for that matter.

Thereafter we will touch on the actual historical setting from which Adorno's aesthetics emerged to explore whether this setting places historical limitations on his theory, as some have charged. We will then briefly discuss how Adorno's background and method inevitably seem to lead to charges of elitism, after which we will close by introducing the subject of the following chapter: the link between negativity and Adorno's preoccupation with truth.

#### Art's Negation of its Origins

One of the powers of artworks, as Adorno stated both in Aesthetic Theory and in Negative Dialectics, is their ability to negate their origins, an important element of their autonomy. We should stress here, however, that Adorno always viewed works of art as man-made products of labor, not magical, inexplicable products of genius. "Works of art are products of social labor" (AT, p. 323), ". . . artifacts of human creation . . ." (AT, p. 6, translation modified).<sup>2</sup> "Producers of great art are no demigods but fallible, often neurotic and damaged human beings" (AT, p. 245, translation modified).<sup>3</sup> Yet artworks can negate or move beyond their status as mere artifacts and approach truth. "A metaphysics of art today has to centre on the question of how something spiritual like art can be man-made or, as they say in philosophy, merely posited, while at the same time being true" (AT, p. 191).<sup>4</sup> As we shall see throughout his work on aesthetics, this necessity forces Adorno to construct a quite elaborate system by which art can be seen to separate itself from its origins.

Although artworks emerge from within the empirical administered world by becoming infused with spirit, they become more than mere artifacts.

Art negates the conceptualization foisted on the real world and yet harbors in its own substance elements of the empirically existent. . . . Even the most sublime work of art takes up a definite position *vis-à-vis* empirical reality by stepping out of reality's spell, not once and for all, but again and again in concrete ways, when it unconsciously polemicizes against the condition of society at the particular historical hour. (AT, p. 7, translation modified)<sup>5</sup>

In this transformation from empirical artifact to autonomous bearer of potential truth, the antagonisms existing in the administered world are not covered over. Instead the unresolved contradictions in society or reality become more conspicuously apparent in artworks, not in their content or "message," but instead in their form.

The unresolved antagonisms of reality reappear in art in the guise of immanent problems of artistic form. . . . In art, the criterion of success is twofold: first, works of art must be able to integrate materials and details into their immanent law of form; and, second, they must not try to erase the fractures left by the process of integration, preserving instead in the aesthetic whole the traces of those elements which resisted integration. (AT, pp. 8-10)<sup>6</sup>

Through the production of artworks a privileged realm is created. "Works of art expand the area of human domination to the extreme, not in a literal sense, but in the sense of positing a sphere unto itself which by its very immanence differs from real domination, thus negating the heteronomy of the latter" (AT, p. 114).<sup>7</sup> During this process, artworks draw on the stuff of the empirical world but transform it by placing the material into new and revealing constellations that, by becoming infused with spirit, negatively project truth. The task of aesthetics or of a philosophy of art, therefore, is to point out the results of such transformations and to display art's components both in relation to the world and in relation to art's rejection of that world from which these components are derived.

Illusion and Commodity Fetishism; Ideology and Truth

Artworks proclaim their autonomy foremost through their resistance to society. By existing for themselves and renouncing exchange value, a being-for-other, artworks distance themselves from the committed agenda of the administered world.<sup>8</sup> Yet even art is unable to escape commodity fetishism, and here Adorno's argument separates decidedly from that of Marx and becomes complicated. An example of the difficulty Adorno's argument presents is his seemingly paradoxical statements concerning art's status as commodity: if art gives up its resistance to society and reifies itself, it will become a commodity. However, even if art continues to resist society, it still becomes a commodity; in fact, in this instance art becomes what Adorno calls an absolute commodity because through its resistance to society it takes on unique and monopolistic qualities. "Art will live on only as long as it has the power to resist society. If it refuses to reify itself, it becomes a commodity" (AT, p. 321, translation modified).<sup>9</sup> As it is, art is an absolute commodity that is both ideological and true. Since these statements are hardly self-evident, let us try to make them clearer.

If we consider Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, we will recall that his critique rested on the notion that commodities can have no inherent use value, only exchange value. Our relationship to commodities is dominated by our illusion that they however have use value in themselves. What Adorno is saying is that in the modernist era art, characterized by its negativity and its refusal to be communicative, willingly calls attention to its lack of utility, to its purposelessness. But because artworks cannot escape the hold of the capitalist economy they become as artworks commodities through their purposelessness; in

fact because of their unique stance in denouncing their utility, they actually become monopolies in the view of society.

. . . works of art are absolute commodities; they are social products which have discarded the illusion of being-for-society, an illusion tenaciously retained by all other commodities. An absolute commodity rids itself of the ideology inherent in the commodity form. The latter pretends it is a being-for-other whereas in truth it is only for-itself,<sup>10</sup> i.e. for the ruling interests of society. (AT, p. 336).

By being so uniquely purposeless, however, art becomes a monopoly. Its exchange value skyrockets, with the fetishized commodity finding expression through the artwork that does not want to be a commodity. For example, even noncommunicative art cannot prevent communicating, against its own will, an image of wealth and prestige about the person in capitalist society able to afford and outbid others to purchase it. This fetishism is obvious when the purposeless artwork inevitably makes the headlines through the price it can command on the open market. Not surprisingly, the capitalist market makes of the "purposeless" artwork something quite purposeful by putting it up for exchange. Perhaps this is the reason public auctions are the preferred mode of sale: what the owner buys is the proof that he can afford something expensive.

Alas, even as an absolute commodity art has retained its commercial value, becoming a "natural monopoly." Offering art for sale on a market, as pottery and little statues used to be sold in a marketplace, is not some perverse use of art but simply a logical consequence of art's participation in the relations of production. It is possible that completely non-ideological art is entirely unfeasible. Art surely does not become non-ideological just by being antithetical to empirical reality. (AT, p. 336, translation modified)<sup>11</sup>

Thus, through ridding itself of the ideological illusion of being-for-society art becomes an even more valuable commodity and enters into a new ideological position of being prized for a purposelessness that by now is only mythical.

Art's conspiring with the market is only one of the ways it becomes ideological. In fact, ideology is much more basic than that to its existence. As Adorno argues, artworks by definition depend upon illusion and false consciousness for their existence insofar as they emit the false impression of being self-sufficient, independent from the laws of domination that prevail in society. Works of art become what they are through appearance, or Schein, and in doing so they propagate deception.

. . . works of art are products of social labor, and while they are subject to a law of form, be it an externally imposed or self-generated one, they do tend to isolate themselves from what they are. Accordingly, every single work of art is vulnerable to the charge of false consciousness and ideology. In purely formal terms, independent of what they express, art works are ideological because they a priori posit a spiritual entity as though it were independent of any conditions of material production, hence as though it were intrinsically<sup>12</sup> superior to these conditions. (AT, p. 323, translation modified)

As we shall see, however, the fact that artworks constitute appearance or Schein is no reason to abandon them. Rather, Adorno advocates that Schein must be saved, since only appearance can illustrate reconciliation in a false and fallen world.<sup>13</sup>

For now, let us simply point out that artworks' complicity in ideology, their deception in passing themselves off as wholes, does not exclude them from being truthful: ". . . works of art are not finished just because of their culpable fetishism, for in a world that is totally mediated by social reality nothing is blameless" (AT, p. 323, translation modified).<sup>14</sup> In fact, it is the ubiquitous mediation and domination in society that force art to resort to deceptive appearance (Schein) to convey at least a hint of what something would look like that exists freely and for itself, beyond the social influence of domination. This is why Schein must be saved.

As a response to this need, l'art pour l'art, in Adorno's view, is truthful insofar as it recognized that only an artwork divorced from society could be true. "Works of art are plenipotentiaries of things no longer a part of the mutating sway of exchange, profit and the false needs of degraded humans" (AT, p. 323, translation modified).<sup>15</sup> L'art pour l'art of course failed in its endeavor to separate itself from society, but in articulating the need for art to be autonomous it recognized a necessary characteristic of art.

### Culpability

Artworks pay a price for their autonomy, however, since such distance also leads art into the dangerous position of becoming superfluous. They also become culpable, in Adorno's view, because they refuse to intervene in the horrors of a world that inflicts suffering upon the innocent. It is difficult, however, to see how art could overcome its culpability, for when art attempts to intervene, as in the cases of overtly committed political art, it perhaps succeeds as propaganda, preaching to the already converted, but as art it fails miserably in Adorno's view. This failure is inevitable because as soon as art attempts to advocate particular political or social agenda it sacrifices its autonomous status and therewith its claim to truth;<sup>16</sup> without any truth content art fails. Thus, art today finds itself in a dilemma. If it renounces its autonomy in order to intervene directly in the matters of the world, it sacrifices its truth content. If, however, art steadfastly remains within the realm of autonomy, it can easily be co-opted and rendered unimportant in the view of society.

This dilemma for art is relatively new, since throughout most of history art was not autonomous and thus had no choice to make. Pre-autonomous art, however, offers in Adorno's view little indication that it dealt with suffering any

better than modern art; in fact, modernism, in contrast to pre-autonomous art, is superior, as is evident from Adorno's fervent defense of modernism throughout his writings. For example, Adorno writes in criticism of pre-autonomous art: "The real barbarism of ancient times--slavery, genocide, the contempt for human life--has left virtually no trace in art from classical Athens forward. Art has kept all of this out of its sacred precincts, a feature that does nothing to inspire respect for art" (AT, p. 231, translation modified).<sup>17</sup> If art now has any hope of survival, it is through opposition to society, resistance to its ills, and a willingness to portray these ills without trying to solve them or reconcile contradictions. Adorno refers to Hegel as being the first philosopher to have realized this by stating that if utopia were ever actually realized, art would come to an end (see AT, p. 47; AT, p. 56).

#### Historical Limits?

Although some concept of autonomous art is important in understanding modern and avant-garde developments in art, Peter Bürger has criticized Adorno's treatment of autonomy as lacking rigor and historical precision.<sup>18</sup> While Adorno is of course aware of the dangers in establishing timeless rules and measures, he, in Bürger's view, nevertheless appears to fall prey in his enthusiasm for the new and the noncommunicative to just such an ahistorical approach.

Let there be no mistake: Adorno certainly does not claim that his aesthetic theory is valid for all of art; in fact, he makes it quite clear that modernism, as a negation not only of previous styles but of tradition itself, calls for new aesthetic criteria of evaluation. Yet in Bürger's view, Adorno implies that true art from his era on has to be judged by its resistance to society, its

noncommunicability, its autonomy, and its utilization of the most advanced techniques available. By addressing himself to the modern (for Adorno, the art after Baudelaire), however, Adorno, and here is Bürger's criticism, is necessarily setting up a particular historical society in a particular epoch that art must oppose, an epoch that will presumably one day be as historicized as have been previous epochs. To support his charge, Bürger attempts to refine the notion of what conditions and constitutes autonomy in art.<sup>19</sup>

Bürger examines the changes that occurred in the evolution from sacred art via courtly art to bourgeois art according to three criteria: the utility purpose (Verwendungszweck), production, and reception. Of importance in these transformations is the shift from collective means of production and reception in the sacred stage (Adorno would say pre-autonomous), when the artwork served as cult object, to an individual means of production but collective means of reception in the courtly stage, to individual production and reception in bourgeois art. In the first phase, when artists as craftsmen produced art objects with the same technology that was employed in other areas of production, artists could not be easily distinguished from other workers. With the eventual historical split between producers (workers) and the means of production in the manufacture of consumer goods, artists took on a special status by remaining craftsmen with means of production at their immediate disposal. Shifts in the area of reception also contributed to the autonomy of art: as artists began producing for the open market of collectors instead of fulfilling the contracts of patrons, they gained more say over their efforts, with the result that artistic concerns could gain precedence. Thus, historical and technological evolution provided the conditions which allowed artists to distance themselves from

day-to-day life (Lebenspraxis) and thus create the autonomous aesthetic sanctuary that Adorno hails.

Bürger, however, argues that such autonomy is not the final phase of development, for the avant-garde artists, recognizing separation from day-to-day life (Lebenspraxis) as the most palpable characteristic of art in bourgeois society, actively sought an Aufhebung of art in the Hegelian sense of the word. Their attempt was thus not only the destruction of art as it was known, but furthermore a reintegration of art back into day-to-day life (Lebenspraxis), where it would be preserved in a changed form (see Bürger, Theorie der Avantgarde, p. 67).<sup>20</sup>

Bürger's presentation is valuable for several reasons: it provides a model with which to examine more precisely the relationship between art and society; it helps to place Adorno's theory in a specific context; it also helps to point out a somewhat one-sided nature Adorno's theory takes on because of the philosopher's reluctance at times to concern himself with questions of reception (I will address this problem in detail in my discussion of reception theory in Chapter V).

One of Bürger's conclusions resulting from his study of avant-garde techniques appears to strike a blow to Adorno's contention that the new and radical best characterizes true art. Adorno stated many times that art, if it were to survive at all in the reified world, had to resist convention by always striving to adopt the most modern material and techniques.<sup>21</sup> Bürger, however, argues that the techniques of avant-garde art often entail recycling techniques from all types of earlier periods to the point of radical synchrony of styles (he points to the techniques employed in some works of René Magritte as an example). "Through the avant-garde movement the historical progression of modes of proceeding and

styles have been transformed into a synchrony of the radically different. As a result, no artistic movement today can legitimately make the claim to be as art more historically advanced than other movements" (Bürger, Theorie der Avant-garde, p. 86, my translation).<sup>22</sup> In arguing that modernism is more advanced than previous movements, Adorno shows himself, at least in Bürger's estimation, to be too historically tied to this movement to acknowledge sufficiently its historicity.

One weakness in Bürger's argument lies in his failure to realize that the sword of historicity he fervently wields against others is double edged. Bürger seems to feel that he has won if he can prove that Adorno's remarks are limited to a certain historical context which has now been transcended. And yet what Bürger ascribes to avant-garde art--a radical synchrony of styles and modes of proceeding--seems as historical and oversimplified as anything in Adorno's argument. What does it mean, one may ask, to have a synchrony of styles, and how is one to read individual styles as being connected with different "historical" levels of advancement? The apparent answer is that only as interpretation can such conclusions be drawn, although Bürger seems to confuse what is obviously an interpretation with irrefutable facts.

For example, Bürger does not seem to appreciate how difficult it is to uphold the claim that avant-garde art exhibits the radical synchrony of styles he wants to see, nor does he realize that his argument is just as historical as Adorno's. Bürger charges that in supporting modernism, Adorno fails to take into account that modernism is historical too. However, in supporting and arguing for synchrony, Bürger is just as historical as Adorno, since any notion of a synchrony of styles is also historical. In fact, Bürger is in greater trouble than Adorno, for to make a case for a synchrony of styles Bürger must explain

how he can discern from his (historical) perspective that earlier styles are being employed in such a way as to create a synchrony without obscuring the individual historical strands. If these strands cannot be recognized as retaining their historical uniqueness despite the new context, then there can be no talk of synchrony.

Another phase of Bürger's argument, the inability to decide anymore what art is most advanced, is just as difficult. Bürger not only wants to apply the term "advanced" in order to tie a particular art movement to a specific historical moment--say that modernism came after social realism, which makes the former more "advanced" at least according to literary history; to this temporal use of "advanced" Bürger appears to add the qualitative connotation of the word too. The consequences of this oversimplification are profound. For example, literary historians would certainly be hard pressed to argue that an artistic movement that subsumes an earlier one is qualitatively more advanced than that before it, although Bürger's description of avant-garde art rests on this very claim about pre-avant-garde art.

In making this claim, Bürger argues that the recycling of previous styles by avant-garde artists is somehow unique, which it is not. Moreover, such a recycling from the past cannot be accomplished without the new context in which the past form is placed, altering this past form, revealing it as only a shadow of what it once was. One of many possible illustrations of this phenomenon is T. S. Eliot's Wasteland in which many poetic forms of the past are recycled through the poem. One cannot therefore say, however, that one of the competing styles is more advanced than another, for in the new context of the poem these various elements set up a sort of stylistic intertextuality that

leaves both the present and the past altered. To put it shortly, a borrowed form or style from an earlier period is no longer the same.

Bürger also seems to forget that any synchrony must be recognizable from some place. If, however, the observation is made somewhere outside the synchrony, then the synchrony is historicized and becomes a part of the cycle Bürger criticizes and cannot be simply an ahistorical recycling of past styles.

### Art and Praxis

In another charge against Adorno, Bürger argues that avant-garde artists, recognizing that separation between art and "life praxis" (*Lebenspraxis*) was the major characteristic of bourgeois art, sought to reintegrate art back into life praxis, thereby making distinctions between art and empirical objects superfluous.<sup>23</sup> Yet such an Aufhebung seems hard to imagine if the products of these artists are still recognized as art, which they are if one considers the manner in which they are presented. I would argue that the mere use of mundane materials or even complete empirical objects in constituting artworks is not enough to undercut the separation between art and life praxis as long as the producers are still considered artists and their products are still received or displayed as art.

At a recent exhibit in the Cannes art festival, for example, one piece, entitled "folded map," consisted of a standard nautical chart that can easily be purchased by anyone. It was folded the way most maps eventually end up after too much use: incorrectly, rendering it somewhat bulky, with different spatial relationships than a freshly folded map. This map was thumb-tacked to a bulletin board. Bürger might argue that this exhibit constituted the trampling of the distinction between life praxis and art that avant-garde artists intend. My

response is that in displaying this mundane object as art and calling it such, the artist has already placed the said material into a new constellation for the recipients viewing the exhibit to see the map in a different light and under different assumptions. The very question of whether the map is or is not art emerges from this new context, since one would presumably not pose this question, had the poorly-folded map been discovered in a glove compartment instead of in an exhibit. It thus seems as if what Bürger sees as unique in avant-garde art is merely another variety of negativity or defamiliarization that is in no way new.

#### General Validity of Theory

As the preceding discussion of Bürger shows, deriving an aesthetic theory from one privileged historical epoch or artistic style becomes troublesome when the theory goes beyond elucidating already existing artworks to prescribing what constitutes successful art in general or in the future. Bürger appears rightly to be opposed to such judgments, although the means with which he argues the point are insufficient. Nevertheless, Bürger's reading of the Adorno-Lukács debate as representing two permutations of this very problem remains sound and helpful, and insofar as Adorno employs his aesthetic theory to chastise certain art movements and promote others are his arguments for modernism's truth potential similar to Georg Lukács's insistence that the great novels of social realism best convey truth.

But the better statement against the respective canon defenses of Adorno and Lukács is brought not by Bürger (for reasons we have discussed), but by Jameson on the topic of Lukács.

. . . Lukács was not wrong to make the connection between modernism and the reification of daily life: his mistake was to have done so ahistorically and to have made his analysis the occasion for an ethical judgment rather than a historical perception. . . . [E]ven the terms of judgment--progressive or reactionary--are not wrong, provided they lead to an ever greater sense of the complexity and dialectical ambivalence of history, rather than to its dogmatic simplification.<sup>24</sup>

Here Jameson correctly identifies an unfortunate consequence of both aesthetic theories based on decisions about canon formation. While such theories are designed to show precisely why the chosen canon is exemplary for truth, taste, or accomplished works of art, they are regrettably utilized to engage in trans-historical polemics with theorists promoting other canons. In this manner, Lukács proclaims social realism as the point from which one can see that twentieth-century avant-garde merely represents the decadence of the modern world; in this "decadence," of course, Adorno sees the truth of an oppositional and noncommunicative art.<sup>25</sup> More helpful would be a theory of mediation that would allow more thoughtful comparisons of various societies and their cultural artifacts and include a scheme for discerning art's enigmatic observations. For Adorno, this task was the domain of philosophy.

#### Art and Philosophy

Art's revelations do not erupt automatically. Art must depend on philosophy to articulate the antinomies that art tacitly expresses.

The subject matter of aesthetics . . . is defined negatively as its undefinability. That is why art needs philosophy to interpret it. Philosophy says what art cannot say, although it is art alone which is able to say it: by not saying it. (AT, p. 107)<sup>26</sup>

The success of artworks rests, in Adorno's view, in the process of their decomposition, a process which reveals to the discerning eye of philosophy, in

Adorno's reception, the inevitable gaps and breaks that occur when works of art attempt to be wholes. Through its detection of art's decomposition, philosophy is able to identify art's spirit through the process of critique. This identification of spirit is essential to art's truth content for "Art is antithetical to empirical reality only as spirit, which moves toward determinate negation of the existing order of things" (AT, p. 131).<sup>27</sup> Thus philosophy plays a major role in lending art its voice that opposes empirical reality.

While the spirit of art works is not a concept, it is through spirit that they become commensurable with concepts. Critique interprets the spirit of works of art on the basis of the configurations in them, confronting the moments with each other and with the spirit as it appears to them. In so doing critique passes over into a truth beyond the realm of aesthetic configurations. That is why criticism is an essential and necessary complement of art works. Criticism recognizes the truth content of works in their spirit, or alternatively denies that they have any truth content because they have no spirit. The only place where art and philosophy converge is in this act of criticism--which is a far cry from philosophy dictating to art what its spirit ought to be. (AT, p. 131)<sup>28</sup>

Adorno's assessment of philosophy's role is more difficult than it seems. While he often makes rather elaborate statements about what "philosophy" derives from art, one might object that philosophy consists of the work and thought of many individual philosophers, many of whom may not agree with the truth that Adorno has detected. It is of course correct that agreement among philosophers is no guarantee of truth. Yet Adorno, by dogmatically insisting on one truth in statements like "[i]n art, as elsewhere, there is only one truth" (AT, p. 353), appears to be dictating to philosophy an unjustified ultimatum.<sup>29</sup> It is obvious that various critics interpret art differently, although they all may make very strong cases for the "truth" of their interpretations. This seems a reasonable circumstance for several reasons: art's truth is conditioned by the falseness of reality, different aspects of which may well be apparent to different

critics. While no one would reasonably demand consensus among critics' interpretations (all of which, by the way, may be attempts to find truth) as a verification of their truth value, Adorno seems to deny multiplicity of truth in his argument for the one truth of art. If there is only one truth, however, consensus would be necessary if critics were to correctly identify this one truth.

It is of course a platitude to say that critics often disagree, so the question arises: Whom are we to believe? If we are to believe Adorno in §44 of Minima Moralia, the drive to be right and to win arguments, a vestige of the human drive for self-preservation, has no place in dialectical thinking.<sup>30</sup> However, in view of Adorno's disputes with most past as well as contemporary philosophers (with the exception of Benjamin, with whom he also did not always agree), Adorno does not appear to always keep this drive in himself at bay.<sup>31</sup>

The problem of truth and consensus in Adorno perhaps results from his not always successful attempts to reconcile polemics with dialectics. It also frustrates attempts to criticize Adorno, for if one takes him to task for one of his aphoristic (and often unsupported) polemical decrees, he can always slip through the charge with the claim that the statement was only part of the dialectic and that the true negative dialectic does not try to win arguments anyway. Adorno attacks without allowing counterattack. On the issue of truth, for example, Adorno at times seems to demand consensus, as we have pointed out. "Great works of art are unable to lie" (AT, p. 188).<sup>32</sup> This position, however, is juxtaposed in the dialectic to the statement that no privileged perspective exists: "The distinction between truth as such and truth as an adequate expression of false consciousness is untenable, because no true consciousness has ever existed to this day and there is no Archimedean point from which the distinction is perceptible" (AT, p. 188).<sup>33</sup>

Adorno's way out of this predicament is perhaps the argument that while artworks have only one truth, this truth is only realized in glimpses and that these glimpses are directly bound to a philosophical comprehension of art. In this light, philosophy the process, not the statements of individual philosophers, is what is crucial in at least theoretically articulating art's truth. By this process, I mean the necessary philosophical component of aesthetic experience that, to name one example, during the act of reception keeps alive the insight that artworks are ideological illusions; as we saw earlier, this knowledge, arrived at through philosophy, is a necessary part of art's truth.

Another dimension of this process can be illustrated by Adorno's insistence that objects must be criticized immanently on their own terms. As Adorno describes, this process (like the process of artistic production that mediates truth below the surface of the artist's conscious efforts, which is described in "Artistic Production" in Chapter IV below) is less fallible than other forms of criticism because it only articulates what the object says anyway--albeit by not saying it. Again, Adorno seems to seek assurance that statements of criticism are true by not allowing them to enter from an outside discipline of knowledge or an idiosyncratic personal or political background. As we will point out below, however, the extreme individuality that manifests itself in Adorno's critical essays appears to hurt his case for immanent criticism's claim to veracity.

#### Elitism

Adorno's statements about art's truth content are probably the major irritation that leads some commentators to charge him with elitism. Reasons for this accusation, I believe, have to do both with Adorno's love of polemical dialectics and his inordinate sense of individuality.

In practicing his dialectic, it often looks as if Adorno simply posits judgments without feeling compelled either to produce evidence or to outline logical steps that lead to the statement.<sup>34</sup> This problem is a result of Adorno's conviction that philosophical concepts do not coincide with what one wants to express. He therefore plays concepts against each other without ever trying to pin them down.<sup>35</sup> Gillian Rose describes Adorno's dialectic well and offers a reason why many readers of Adorno remain skeptical.

Adorno presents whatever philosophy he is discussing so as to expose its basic antinomies. He then shows that only a dialectical approach can resolve the antinomy, often by turning it into a chiasmus, and that this must involve a reference to society. He calls this "following the logic of aporias," or the "immanent method," and it justifies his rough and tendentious treatment of the texts of others'. . . . Adorno's critique of philosophy is not always convincing. The philosophical weaknesses which he exposes have often been discerned by critics writing from quite different positions. He succeeds in this sense even though he never takes the philosophy with which he is engaging entirely on its own terms. It is difficult, however, to judge the move from revealing irreconcilable antinomies in central concepts to establishing the social origins of those antinomies. This is partly because the move is always accomplished by means of chiasmus and analogy, and partly because there are no criteria by which to judge that this move is the only one which can account for the antinomies discerned. . . .<sup>36</sup>

While Rose's description is directed toward Adorno's philosophical writings, the same technique causes critics of Adorno's aesthetics to react similarly.

The force of Adorno's polemical dialectic combined with evidence considered flimsy or absent often leads critics to mistake a dialectical exercise for an imposition of will by fiat. But there is more to the frustration. While condemning the conditions of the world, Adorno condemns with equal fervor those who advocate practical and committed attempts to change these conditions. These characteristics--highly individual but sweeping judgments about the falseness of the world and an excluding argumentation and style that seems

almost authoritarian--convinced many (especially some of the equally dogmatic leftist students of the '60s) that Adorno was not really of value to those demanding action: theory as an end and an action in itself was rejected as insufficient and elitist. Although a whole host of sources chastise Adorno for his rejection of practical action, Karol Sauerland makes the case in a succinct and representative manner.

Despite justified rejection of that which [Adorno] calls pseudo-activism, a limitation to the demasking of false consciousness and repressive measures is too little. It should have at least been his goal to allow the gesture of resistance to become a general one. Yet Adorno was not able to posit this goal, on the one hand, because he pursued the elitist ideal of the lonely individual and on the other hand, because he feared that ideas the masses seize not only become material violence; he also feared that at the same time these ideas could lose their original explosive power.<sup>37</sup>

Adorno's upbringing and training (especially in classical music) also contributed to the charges of elitism. When, for example, Adorno described some of the jolts he experienced in the United States--"I still remember the shock a young immigrant woman provided me when we were first in New York when she, daughter from a so-called well-bred high social class, declared: 'One used to go to the philharmonic concert, now one goes to Radio City'"--critics could not help but detect in his reactions a well developed arrogance.<sup>38</sup> Adorno, however, valued the American experience, for as he described, it enabled him to overcome his background, which had convinced him since childhood that the absolute relevance of the mind (des Geistes) was self-evident. ". . . in America, where no silent respect for everything intellectual (vor allem Geistigen) prevails [I was taught] that [this relevance] was by no means valid; the absence of this respect gave rise to critical self-reflection."<sup>39</sup> Some critics, however, would nevertheless claim that Adorno's shocks and self-reflection were still not enough for him to

overcome his faith in his own discerning powers of judgment and his equally strong distrust of the judgments of others, including others' evaluations of art. Let us return to the role this attitude often appears to play in Adorno's art criticism.

If, for example, Adorno states that art has only one truth, ascribes highly specialized qualifications to a philosophy necessary to perceive such truth, and then as philosopher comments on the truth of a particular art piece (something from Beethoven's middle period, for instance), it is easy to see how Adorno's case for philosophy can be interpreted as merely a justification for the claim that his judgments are more sound than those of others. If works of art are great, they cannot lie. Those works from which he can derive no truth Adorno calls botched.

If we, however, give Adorno the benefit of the doubt that he is sincerely arguing for a philosophical, dialectical process of immanent criticism, not high flying justifications for his own interpretations, then we should read citations like the following not as merely veiled autobiographical statements.

Recent technical criteria for judging the quality of art have no discriminating power; one may as well go back to the discredited concept of taste in order to judge in these matters. Many modern works simply defy the question of how good or bad they are. Their claim to excellence rests, as Boulez pointed out, on their abstract opposition to the culture industry rather than on their content or the artist's ability to articulate this opposition. Consequently any decision about how good or bad something is should rest not with the artist, but with an aesthetics that is fully conversant with the most advanced artistic developments, yet superior to them in its ability to reflect. (AT, p. 470)<sup>40</sup>

The process of criticism thus goes on; only the goals of the enterprise change. Instead of criticism struggling with the question of whether specific artworks are good or bad, philosophically guided criticism must concern itself with the

question of what constitutes art at all, with the preponderant criterion in this decision being truth content.

In this process, decisions about truth are closely related to two central concepts that we will examine in the next two chapters: negativity and mediation. Since art's truth is used in Adorno's work to act as a determinate negation to society, any serious examination of Adorno's aesthetic must take up the issue of negativity.

#### Toward Negativity and Negation

The discussion of negativity in a dialectical scheme inevitably leads to the more difficult question of mediation in Adorno's aesthetic, specifically the problematic implications for the issue of conceptuality that result from Adorno's assigning art to a privileged realm. These implications we will examine in Chapter IV. For the moment, let it suffice to raise the question of the difference Adorno notes between the cognitive perception of artworks and the perception of so-called empirical objects. Just such a difference appears to be the reason artworks are such an integral part of Adorno's entire philosophical canon. By postulating that artworks can negatively evoke perception other than the conceptual, Adorno ascribes to artworks a power different from that of empirical objects.

Concepts are as indispensable to art as they are to language, but in art they become something qualitatively different than the concepts as characteristics of empirical objects. The impact of concepts being interspersed with art is not identical with the conceptuality of art. Art is no more a concept than it is a view or attitude (*Anschabung*), and by its being neither art protests against that dichotomy. Moreover art's view or attitude (*Anschauliches*) differs from sensual perception because it always refers to spirit. Art is a view of that which cannot be viewed; it is similar to a concept without actually being one. It is in reference to concepts, however, that art releases

its mimetic, non-conceptual layer. (AT, pp. 141-42, translation modified)<sup>41</sup>

The task for the next two chapters is thus to outline the manner in which art as negativity functions. Furthermore, we must examine in detail how works can be interpreted as mediating social issues at all and additionally, to what extent such mediation differs from that of empirical objects or discursive knowledge.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Im Wahrheitsgehalt, oder in dessen Abwesenheit, fallen ästhetische und soziale Kritik zusammen" Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie: zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen, in Dissonanzen: Musik in der verwalteten Welt, Vol. XIV of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> "Kunstwerke, Produkte gesellschaftlicher Arbeit" (AT, p. 337), ". . . Arte-fakte, menschliche Hervorbringungen. . ." (AT, p. 14).

<sup>3</sup> "Die Produzenten bedeutender Kunstwerke sind keine Halbgötter sondern fehlbare, oft neurotische und beschädigte Menschen" (AT, p. 256).

<sup>4</sup> "Die Metaphysik von Kunst heute ordnet sich um die Frage, wie ein Geistiges, das gemacht, nach der Sprache der Philosophie, 'bloß gesetzt' ist, wahr sein könne" (AT, p. 198).

<sup>5</sup> "Kunst negiert die der Empirie kategorial aufgeprägten Bestimmungen und birgt doch empirisch Seiendes in der eigenen Substanz. . . . Noch das sublimste Kunstwerk bezieht bestimmte Stellung zur empirischen Realität, indem es aus deren Bann heraustritt, nicht ein für allemal, sondern stets wieder konkret, bewußtlos polemisch gegen dessen Stand zur geschichtlichen Stunde" (AT, p. 15).

<sup>6</sup> "Die ungelösten Antagonismen der Realität kehren wieder in den Kunstwerken als die immannten Probleme ihrer Form. . . . Das Kriterium der Kunstwerke ist doppelschlächtig: ob es ihnen glückt, ihre Stoffschichten und Details dem ihnen immannten Formgesetz zu integrieren und in solcher Integration das ihr Widerstrebende, sei's auch mit Brüchen, zu erhalten" (AT, p. 16, 18).

<sup>7</sup> "Sie [Kunstwerke] dehnen den Herrschaftsbereich der Menschen extrem aus, doch nicht buchstäblich, sondern kraft der Setzung einer Sphäre für sich, die eben durch ihre gesetzte Immanenz von der realen Herrschaft sich scheidet und damit diese in ihrer Heteronomie negiert" (AT, p. 120).

<sup>8</sup> In Adorno's work, resistance against exchange value is often synonymous with resistance against the domination of identity thinking, for identity thinking is the type of domination that renders diverse objects and services (particulars) commensurable and equivalent at least insofar as they can then be exchanged. For more on identity thinking and domination see "The Beauty of Nature and the

*Beauty of Art*" in Chapter III. For more on the exchange principle in Adorno and Horkheimer, see Norbert Rath, "Zur Kritik am Tauschprinzip," Chapter 3.1 in Adornos Kritische Theorie: Vermittlungen und Vermittelungsschwierigkeiten (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1982), pp. 52-57. On the exchange principle in Adorno, see Joseph F. Schmucker, Adorno--Logik des Zerfalls (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977), pp. 46-58.

<sup>9</sup> "Einzig durch ihre gesellschaftliche Resistenzkraft erhält Kunst sich am Leben; verdinglicht sie sich nicht, so wird sie Ware" (AT, p. 335).

<sup>10</sup> "[D]ie Kunstwerke [sind tatsächlich] absolute Ware als jenes gesellschaftliche Produkt, das jeden Schein des Seins für die Gesellschaft abgeworfen hat, den sonst Waren krampfhaft aufrecht erhalten. . . . Die absolute Ware wäre der Ideologie ledig, welche der Warenform innenwohnt, die prätendiert, ein Für anderes zu sein, während sie ironisch ein bloßes Für sich: das für die Verfügenden ist" (AT, p. 351).

<sup>11</sup> "Auch die absolute Ware ist verkäuflich geblieben und zum 'natürlichen Monopol' geworden. Daß Kunstwerke, wie einmal Krüge und Statuetten, auf dem Markt feilgeboten werden, ist nicht ihr Mißbrauch sondern die einfache Konsequenz aus ihrer Teilhabe an den Produktionsverhältnissen. Durchaus unideologisch ist Kunst wohl überhaupt nicht möglich. Durch ihre bloße Antithese zur empirischen Realität wird sie es nicht" (AT, p. 351).

<sup>12</sup> ". . . Kunstwerke, Produkte gesellschaftlicher Arbeit, ihrem Formgesetz untertan oder eines erzeugend, [dichten] sich gegen das [ab], was sie selbst sind. Insofern könnte ein jedes Kunstwerk vom Verdikt falschen Bewußtseins ereilt und der Ideologie zugerechnet werden. Formal sind sie, unabhängig von dem was sie sagen, Ideologie darin, daß sie a priori Geistiges als ein von den Bedingungen seiner materiellen Produktion Unabhängiges und darum höher Geartetes setzen. . ." (AT, p. 337).

<sup>13</sup> For more on this, see "The Hunger for Wholeness" in Chapter IV as well as endnote 23 below about an essay by Albrecht Wellmer.

<sup>14</sup> "Aber mit ihrem schuldhaften Fetischismus sind die Kunstwerke nicht abgetan, so wenig wie irgendein Schuldhaftes; denn nichts in der universal gesellschaftlich vermittelten Welt steht außerhalb ihres Schuldzusammenhangs" (AT, p. 337).

<sup>15</sup> "Kunstwerke sind die Statthalter der nicht länger vom Tausch verunstalteten Dinge, des nicht durch den Profit und das falsche Bedürfnis der entwürdigten Menschheit Zugerichteten" (AT, p. 337).

<sup>16</sup> On this point, Walter Benjamin disagreed, for reasons he outlined in the essays "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "The Author as Producer." In the latter essay, Benjamin argues that the author should relinquish his autonomy in order join the cause of the proletariat both in his writings and his personal actions. Benjamin believes that this change, destroying the distinction between reader and writer by opening up the role of writer to the reader, could revolutionize the whole enterprise of writing. As evidence that such changes have already begun, Benjamin calls on a quote by Sergej Tretjakow describing the revolutionary function of public media in the Soviet Union. "For the reader is at all times ready to become a writer, that is, a describer, but also a prescriber. As an expert--even if not on a subject but only on the post he occupies--he gains access to authorship. Work itself has its turn to speak" ("The Author as Producer," in The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt [New York: Urizen, 1978], p. 259). ["Der Lesende ist dort jederzeit bereit, ein Schreibender, nämlich ein Beschreibender oder auch ein Vorschreibender zu werden. Als Sachverständiger-- und sei es auch nicht für ein Fach, vielmehr nur für den Posten, den er versieht--gewinnt er einen Zugang zur Autorschaft. Die Arbeit selbst kommt zu Wort" ("Der Autor als Produzent," in Vol. II, part two of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 688).] Benjamin's optimism about technological advancement and revolutionary innovation in the artistic realm stands in stark contrast to Adorno's pessimism and fear that mechanical reproduction and ever more technologically advanced forms of transmission would inevitably lead to even more effective means to oppress and liquidate the individual. If we consider what became of the Soviet "revolution" in journalism and art, about which Benjamin was so enthusiastic, Adorno's reservations seem well founded. Nevertheless, some would still point to such an opinion as further evidence of Adorno's elitism (see "Elitism" below in this chapter). A more moderate view, however, expressed in the introduction to the English translation of "The Author as Producer," bears quoting: "Though Lukács and especially Adorno were right to point out the questionable nature of the party-political presuppositions of essays such as this one, we must emphasize Benjamin's 'democratic' corrective (the insistence on community, communication and dialogue, the attack on the 'aura' of the creative personality) to the elitist implications of all Hegelianizing esthetics. The differences between Benjamin of this essay and Adorno do not preclude some overlap; the reader will notice in this context Benjamin's stress on the critically cognitive function of art (especially Brecht's) that takes the reduced, alienated man of today as its starting point. Adorno has to reply that all political, collectivist art must inevitably compromise just this starting point. What he neglects is that to Benjamin the end point, namely speaking to and listening to the mass of the alienated, was as important as the critical dissection of the conditions responsible for alienation" (The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, p. 254). For more on this dispute, see Aesthetics and Politics: James Cowan, rev. of Aesthetics and Politics, ed. Ronald Taylor, Telos: a quarterly journal of radical thought, 41 (1979), p. 209; Susan Buck-Morss, The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute (New York: Free Press, 1977), pp. 136-184.

<sup>17</sup> "Die reale Barbarei in der Antike: Sklaverei, Ausmordung, Verachtung des Menschenlebens, hat seit der attischen Klassizität wenig Spuren in der Kunst

hinterlassen; wie unberührt diese, auch sonst in 'barbarischen Kulturen', sich erhielt, ist nicht ihr Ehrentitel" (AT, pp. 241-42).

<sup>18</sup> See Peter Bürger, Theorie der Avantgarde (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 130, and Vermittlung-Rezeption-Funktion: Ästhetische Theorie und Methodologie der Literaturwissenschaft (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 87-92.

<sup>19</sup> See Peter Bürger, Theorie der Avantgarde, pp. 49-75.

<sup>20</sup> Examples of such art that Bürger cites are the ready-mades by Marcel Duchamp. For criticism of Bürger's position on the sublation of art in daily practice in the avant-garde movement, see Burkhardt Lindner, "Aufhebung der Kunst in Lebenspraxis? Über die Aktualität der Auseinandersetzung mit den historischen Avantgardebewegungen," in "Theorie der Avantgarde": Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft", ed. W. Martin Lüdke (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp. 72-104. On specifics about Duchamp in connection with Bürger's theory, see Dolf Oehler, "Hinsehen, Hinlangen: Für eine Dynamisierung der Theorie der Avantgarde. Dargestellt an Marcel Duchamps Fountain," in the same volume as above, pp. 143-165.

<sup>21</sup> See for example, AT, pp. 28-33 (AT, pp. 36-41), AT, p. 49 (AT, p. 57), AT, pp. 300-303 (AT, pp. 313-316), and Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie: Zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen, Vol. XIV of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 419. See also the discussion of Beckett in Chapter VI below.

<sup>22</sup> "Durch die Avantgardebewegungen ist die historische Abfolge von Verfahrensweisen und Stilen in eine Gleichzeitigkeit des radikal Verschiedenen transformiert worden. Das hat zur Folge, daß heute keine künstlerische Bewegung mehr legitimerweise den Anspruch erheben kann, als Kunst historisch fortgeschritten zu sein als andere Bewegungen" (Bürger, Theorie der Avantgarde, p. 86).

<sup>23</sup> Albrecht Wellmer, in a justified criticism of Bürger, points out that Bürger's campaign against Adorno is specifically directed against the philosopher's attempt to save aesthetic appearance (ästhetischer Schein), which contradicts the pursuits of avant-garde artists to effect an Aufhebung of art through a return to life praxis (Lebenspraxis). (I have already intimated that Schein is necessary in Adorno's view because only such appearance can provide for truth to emerge from falseness; see "Illusion and Commodity Fetishism; Ideology and Truth" in this chapter and "The Hunger for Wholeness" in Chapter IV.) Wellmer recalls that Adorno's remarks about "saving appearance" are actually directed against tendencies toward a false Aufhebung of art. "Bürger . . . fails to take the connection of the aesthetic categories of truth, appearance, and reconciliation seriously in Adorno; if he did, he would have had to notice that Adorno's reservations against a false sublation of art were

grounded in the idea of its true sublation--as realization of its promesse du bonheur (Glücksversprechen). [Bürger nimmt allerdings . . . den Zusammenhang der ästhetischen Kategorien Wahrheit, Schein und Versöhnung [wenig] noch ernst; sonst hätte er bemerken müssen, daß Adornos Vorbehalte gegen eine falsche Aufhebung--als Verwirklichung ihres Glücksversprechens--begründet waren. Albrecht Wellmer, "Wahrheit, Schein, Versöhnung: Adornos ästhetische Rettung der Modernität," in Adorno-Konferenz, ed. Ludwig von Friedeburg and Jürgen Habermas (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 153, my translation.] Wellmer goes on to point out that Adorno's reconciliation paradigm is hardly compatible with the productive core Bürger ascribes to avant-garde efforts in art. For this reason, Bürger replaces Adorno's system of reality, art, and reconciliation with a new connection combining reality, art, and life praxis. In doing this, however, Bürger eliminates the key category of reconciliation.

<sup>24</sup> Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 227.

<sup>25</sup> I will not provide a detailed discussion of the Adorno-Lukács debate, since there are already numerous good accounts. See Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: Verso, 1981), Section Two, Chapter One, pp. 81-100; Peter Bürger, Theorie der Avantgarde pp. 117-28; Martin Jay, Adorno (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 68-69 and pp. 129-30; Karol Sauerland, "Kunst und Realität," in Einführung in die Ästhetik Adornos (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), pp. 135-151; and Ronald Taylor, ed. Aesthetics and Politics: Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno (London: New Left Books, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> "[Der] Gegenstand [der Ästhetik] bestimmt sich als unbestimmbar, negativ. Deshalb bedarf Kunst der Philosophie, die sie interpretiert, um zu sagen, was sie nicht sagen kann, während es doch nur von Kunst gesagt werden kann, indem sie es nicht sagt" (AT, p. 113).

<sup>27</sup> "Nur als Geist ist Kunst der Widerspruch zur empirischen Realität, der zur bestimmten Negation der bestehenden Welteinrichtung sich bewegt" (AT, p. 137).

<sup>28</sup> "Der Geist der Kunstwerke ist nicht Begriff, aber durch ihn werden sie dem Begriff kommensurabel. Indem Kritik aus Konfigurationen in den Kunstwerken deren Geist herausliest und die Momente miteinander und dem in ihnen erscheinenden Geist konfrontiert, geht sie über zu seiner Wahrheit jenseits der ästhetischen Konfiguration. Darum ist Kritik den Werken notwendig. Sie erkennt am Geist der Werke ihren Wahrheitsgehalt oder scheidet ihn davon. In diesem Akt allein, durch keine Philosophie der Kunst, welche dieser diktieren, was ihr Geist zu sein habe, konvergieren Kunst und Philosophie" (AT, p. 137).

<sup>29</sup> "[a]uch ästhetisch gibt es nicht zweierlei Wahrheit" (AT, p. 370).

<sup>30</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben, Vol. IV of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 77-78.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Markus Michel, referring to Adorno's statements about "the dubious judgement of history" (AT, p. 419, ÄT, p. 448) as well as his reluctant concession "that the most renowned works by the most famous masters, while fetishized in modern commodity society, are in fact often superior in terms of quality to those that have been neglected" (AT, p. 279, ÄT, p. 291), justifiably asks how it is possible that people before and without Adorno, despite all their false assumptions about art, for the most part knew which works to value and which to ignore. And why is it that, as Adorno says, "The Greek military junta knew only too well why it banned Beckett's plays in which not a word is said about politics" (AT, p. 333, ÄT, p. 348)? "Versuch, die 'Ästhetische Theorie' zu verstehen," in: Burkhardt Lindner and W. Martin Lüdke, ed., Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie Theodor W. Adornos. Konstruktion der Moderne (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1980), p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> "Große Kunstwerke können nicht lügen" (ÄT, p. 196).

<sup>33</sup> "Die Trennung zwischen einem an sich Wahren und dem bloß adäquaten Ausdruck falschen Bewußtseins ist nicht zu halten, denn bis heute existiert das richtige Bewußtsein nicht, und in keinem, das jene Trennung gleichwie aus der Vogelperspektive gestattete" (ÄT, p. 196).

<sup>34</sup> This style caused him troubles during his exile in the United States. As he describes in his essay "Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," his statements often provoked from skeptical Americans the question "Where is the evidence?" "Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," in Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II: Eingriffe, Stichworte, Anhang, Vol. 10, part two of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 704.

<sup>35</sup> Adorno's reservations about concepts is a main reason why some think Adorno should have become a deconstructionist. For a discussion of this issue, see "Representation" in Chapter VII below.

<sup>36</sup> Gillian Rose, The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 54, 76. For information on Adorno's immanent method of criticism, see Chapter VI below.

<sup>37</sup> "Trotz berechtiger Ablehnung dessen, was er Pseudo-Aktivismus nennt, ist eine Beschränkung auf Demaskierungen falschen Bewußtseins und des Systems der repressiven Maßnahmen zu wenig. Es hätte zumindest sein Ziel sein müssen, die Geste des Sich-Weigerns zu einer allgemeinen werden zu lassen. Doch zu dieser Zielsetzung war Adorno nicht imstande, weil er einerseits einem elitären

Ideal des einsamen Individuums nachhing und er anderseits fürchtete, daß Ideen, die die Massen ergreifen, nicht nur zur materiellen Gewalt werden, sondern zugleich auch ihre ursprüngliche Sprengkraft verlieren könnten." Karol Sauerland, Einführung in die Ästhetik Adornos, p. 16, my translation. Other works that take up the theory-practice issue in Adorno's work include: Frank Böckelmann, "Die Möglichkeit ist die Unmöglichkeit; Die Unmöglichkeit ist die Möglichkeit: Bemerkungen zur Autarkie der Negativen Dialektik," in Die neue Linke nach Adorno, ed. Wilfried F. Schoeller (München: Kindler, 1969), pp. 17-37 (book hereafter abbreviated as DnLnA); Otto F. Gmelin, "Negative Dialektik—Schalt-system der Utopie," in DnLnA, pp. 55-90; Hans N. Schmidt, "Theorie, zu ihrem Ende gedacht," in DnLnA, pp. 135-140; Hans Heinz Holz, "Mephistophelische Philosophie," in DnLnA, pp. 176-192; Johannes Agnoli, "Die Schnelligkeit des realen Prozesses: Vorläufige Skizze eines Versuchs über Adornos historisches Ende," in DnLnA, pp. 193-202; Peter Reichel, Verabsolutierte Negation: Zu Adornos Theorie von den Triebkräften der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung (Berlin: Akademie, 1972); Igor S. Narski, Die Anmaßung der negativen Philosophie Theodor W. Adornos (Frankfurt/M: Verlag Marxistische Blätter, 1975); Friedrich Tomberg, "Utopie und Negation: Zum ontologischen Hintergrund der Kunsttheorie Theodor W. Adornos," Das Argument, 26 (1963), 36-48; Ulrich Sonnemann, "Erkenntnis als Widerstand: Adornos Absage an Aktionsgebärden und ihr Ertrag für die Kriterien von Praxis," in Theodor W. Adorno zum Gedächtnis: Eine Sammlung, ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1971, pp. 150-176; Manfred Clemenz, "Theorie als Praxis? Zur Philosophie und Soziologie Adornos," in neue politische literatur, 13 (1968), 178-194. A defense against the charge of elitism comes from Martin Puder who argues that if Adorno were really elitist, then he would not have exerted such effort attempting to devise a way in which the barrier of reification in the minds of the masses might be penetrated through the shock of art, "Zur 'Ästhetischen Theorie' Adornos," Neue Rundschau, 82 (1971), pp. 465-477.

38 "Ich erinnere mich noch des Schocks, den mir eine Emigrantin wie wir in der New Yorker Anfangszeit bereitete, als sie, Tochter aus sogenanntem guten Hause, erklärte: 'Früher ist man ins philharmonische Konzert gegangen, jetzt geht man ins Radio City,'" ("Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," p. 702, my translation).

39 The German passage from which this quote is pieced together: "In Amerika wurde ich von kulturgläubiger Naivität befreit, erwarb die Fähigkeit, Kultur von außen zu sehen. Um das zu verdeutlichen: mir war, trotz aller Gesellschaftskritik und allem Bewußtsein von der Vormacht der Ökonomie, von Haus aus die absolute Relevanz des Geistes selbstverständlich. Daß diese Selbstverständlichkeit nicht schlechterdings galt, darüber wurde ich in Amerika belehrt, wo kein stillschweigender Respekt vor allem Geistigen herrscht, wie in Mittel- und Westeuropa weit über die sogenannte Bildungsschicht hinaus; die Abwesenheit dieses Respekts veranlaßt den Geist zu kritischer Selbstbesinnung" ("Wissenschaftliche Erfahrung in Amerika," p. 734, my translation).

40 This quote is taken from the published draft introduction to Aesthetic Theory that, according to the editors, Adorno would have scrapped. I never-

theless feel justified in quoting from it because, as Adorno himself stated, the manuscript, although in need of drastic re-writes, basically contained the substantive elements of his argument even though they would have undergone critical stylistic scrutiny. "Was neuerdings für technische Kriterien gilt, gestattet kein Urteil mehr über den künstlerischen Rang und relegiert es vielfach an die überholte Kategorie des Geschmacks. Zahlreiche Gebilde, denen gegenüber die Frage, was sie taugen, inadäquat geworden ist, verdanken sich, nach der Bemerkung von Boulez, bloß noch dem abstrakten Gegensatz zur Kulturindustrie, nicht dem Gehalt und nicht der Fähigkeit, ihn zu realisieren. Die Entscheidung, der sie entgleiten, stünde allein bei einer Ästhetik, die ebenso den avanciertesten Tendenzen gewachsen sich zeigt, wie diese an Kraft der Reflexion einholt und übertrifft" (AT, p. 509).

<sup>41</sup> "Begriffliches ist wie der Sprache so jeglicher Kunst als Eingesprengtes unabdingbar, wird aber darin zu einem qualitativ Anderen als die Begriffe als Merkmaleinheiten empirischer Gegenstände. Der Einschlag von Begriffen ist nicht identisch mit der Begrifflichkeit von Kunst; sie ist Begriff so wenig wie Anschauung, und eben dadurch protestiert sie wider die Trennung. Ihr Anschauliches differiert von der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung, weil es stets auf ihren Geist sich bezieht. Sie ist Anschauung eines Unanschaulichen, begriffsähnlich ohne Begriff. An den Begriffen aber setzt Kunst ihre mimetische, unbegriffliche Schicht frei" (AT, p. 148).

### CHAPTER III

#### NEGATIVITY

Wolfgang Iser, calling negativity "the nonformulation of the not-yet-comprehended," understandably hesitates to define it more formally.<sup>1</sup>

. . . we must not forget that negativity is the basic force in literary communication, and as such it is to be experienced rather than to be explained. If we were able to explain its effect, we would have mastered it discursively and would have rendered obsolescent the experience it provides. Hence definition can only be partial and confined to salient features. (The Act of Reading, p. 226)

Iser articulates here the difficulties involved in trying to define what must resist definition, since to define it directly is to rob it of its meaning. As we shall see, negativity is but one of many terms in Adorno's philosophy and aesthetics (although perhaps the most important) that reveals a major pattern in his thought. This pattern has to do with Adorno's conviction that virtually everything produced and perceived by humankind is tainted by falsehood. Because of this life condition, matters such as truth and reconciliation can only be conveyed and discussed through an intricate system of thought that allows one to cut through thick layers of reification and blindness to reveal glimpses of truth. No matter how elaborate this system, however, it can only work on objects that contain some degree of truth content that, in many cases, must be distilled, concentrated, or amplified by critical activity, that is, run through the apparatus to yield a modest awareness of truth.

The truth-containing object in question here is the artwork, but as the product of mortal artists, it does not magically become a kind of oracle. Instead, the process by which artworks emerge is also highly intricate and, yes, indirect. That such indirect means are called for by Adorno confirms an aspect of negativity that Iser's definition makes clear. It cannot be grasped discursively or, we might add, directly.

Fundamentally, negativity can result from the basic nonidentity or difference between two elements in a dialectical relationship. While Iser has in mind primarily the asymmetry between the literary text and the perceiving subject in his discussion of negativity, such nonidentity is also a fundamental aspect of the relationship between artworks and society or even artworks and themselves.

Artworks, far from being products of complete mimesis, are only partially mimetic. While they are constructed from the elements of empirical reality, works of art alter the relationships of these elements by shifting them into new and unfamiliar constellations.<sup>2</sup> Such a shift forces one, through negativity, to supply the complementing underlying explanation to make again the perceived object at least to some extent comprehensible. To exemplify this process, Iser cites an analysis of Rodin's sculpture by Merleau-Ponty. The phenomenologist points out that to depict a man in motion, the limbs of that man must be placed in a position that they would never take naturally. To account for this deformation, the perceiving subject sets the sculpture into virtual motion in an attempt to make the pose represented in the work of art correspond more closely with a pose one would likely see in the empirical world. Iser writes:

. . . the individual limbs must themselves and also in relation to others reveal a certain degree of deformation, for only if "the position of each limb is . . . according to the logic of the human body incompatible with the others" does the possibility arise of representing movement as the "virtual focal point between legs, trunk, arms and

head." This virtual focal point can only be shown through the "coherent deformation" of the visible. Alienation exploits the same effect by distorting familiar knowledge, and so instigating the recipient to work out hidden causes. It follows that every such act of comprehension is binary by nature: the perception of deformed aspects can only be completed by producing the virtual cause of the deformations. Negativity is therefore at one and the same time the conditioning cause of the deformations and also their potential remedy. (Iser, The Act of Reading, p. 228)

Thus, negativity is a fundamental epistemological element of Erkenntnis (realization, act of becoming aware). As Adorno writes, "Thought as such, before all particular contents, is an act of negation, of resistance to that which is forced upon it."<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, however, Adorno employs negativity, the cornerstone of his thought, in multifaceted ways and contexts. But among the most important concepts in the negativity discussion in Adorno is that of the determinate negation, that which Adorno called "the nerve of dialectics as method."<sup>4</sup>

#### The Determinate Negation: Hegel and Marx

Perhaps helpful in understanding the determinate negation is a quick review of Hegel and Marx.<sup>5</sup> In Wissenschaft der Logik, Hegel made the important distinction between abstract and determinate negation in philosophical critique. The philosopher, referring to the negative thought of Skepticism as a counter-example to the negations of dialectical thought, criticizes the former for its abstract process of negation, a process negating all things without distinction and leading to a never ending series of negations without any positive result or progress in the system. In contradistinction to the abstract negation of Skepticism, Hegel sees in dialectical thinking the possibility for a transcending of negativity via the determinate negation (bestimmte Negation).

A determinate negation determines the nothing from which the negation emerges; this provides for a specific content of the negation. Determinate negation is thus not simply a path to emptiness; on the contrary, every negation preserves within itself a determined nothing from which the negation emerged. Hegel cites as example the determinate negations of cold and darkness that are determinately tied to that which they negate, namely warmth and light respectively.<sup>6</sup> The new concept that emerges from a determinate negation is, according to Hegel, higher and richer than the preceding one, richer by virtue and to the extent of that opposite which has been negated. Such a process allows philosophy to construct useful concepts that can actually lead somewhere, as opposed to the dead-end abstract negations of Skepticism. About the determinate negation Hegel writes:

The only thing, in order to make scientific progress . . . is the recognition of the logical statement that the negative is just as much a positive or that the contradictory does not dissolve itself into null, into abstract nothing, but rather is essentially only the negation of a particular content, or that such a negation is not every negation, but rather the negation of a determined thing that dissolves itself and is thus a determinate negation; that therefore the result essentially contains that from which it resulted—which is actually a tautology, for otherwise it would be an immediate, not a result. Because the result, the negation, is a determinate negation it has a content. The determinate negation is a new concept, but a higher and richer concept than the previous one; for it has become richer by virtue of its negation or opposite of this concept. The determinate negation thus contains the concept but also more than it and is the unity of the concept and its opposite. --The system of concepts has to construct itself in this way—and has to complete itself in an unstoppable, pure movement that does not take anything in from outside.  
(Logik der Wissenschaft, p. 49, my translation)<sup>7</sup>

The determinate negation finds its important conclusion in the process of sublation or Aufhebung, which Hegel characterized as one of the most important concepts of philosophy. "Whatever sublates itself does not become through this process a nothing. Nothing is the immediate; the sublated, on the contrary, is

mediated, is nonbeing, but as result, what has emerged from a being; it therefore retains in itself the determination from whence it came" (Wissenschaft der Logik, pp. 113-114, my translation)<sup>8</sup> Aufhebung in Hegel's thought has a dual sense: it both brings to an end and preserves at the same time, by retaining the negative within itself. "Thus is the sublated at the same time a preserved that has only lost its immediacy, but is not therefore destroyed" (Wissenschaft der Logik, p. 114, my translation).<sup>9</sup>

In Marx, the determinate negation gains a historical dimension. As Grenz writes,

If the term "determinate negation" is to have a place in his teachings at all, then its object realm in Marx means: class society. To sublate (Aufheben) class society means: The liquidation of its class character, the preservation of its social character. "Determinate" means that the class society in its present form--capitalism--is sublated practically through the deeds of humans: liquidated in its relations of production, preserved in its productive forces. Decidedly important here if the result is to be from a determinate negation is that the productive forces cannot alone remain behind; rather the determined nothing of the class society must have as its content new relations of production. (Grenz, pp. 79-80, my translation)<sup>10</sup>

Grenz argues convincingly that Marx, in his attempts to translate Hegel's dialectics, and specifically the determinate negation, from a model of mental processes into one of practical action with a historical dimension, sacrifices the dialectics for practical application. In Kapital, for example, only Marx's analysis of the concept of the commodity is really dialectical in the Hegelian sense; Marx's discussion of history and of revolution as determinate negation, especially in projecting that the determinate negation of capitalism or fascism is socialism, is marked more by positivistic than dialectical traits. Grenz rightly reminds us that the new something that results from a sublation in the sense of Hegel takes its content from what is sublated. Therefore, the sublation of class antagonism

cannot be conceived as a determinate negation if the desired product is the entire liquidation of class character.

To summarize, then, Grenz sees Hegel's dialectics as being dialectical but ahistorical; Marx, on the other hand, is historical but undialectical. This circumstance points to the problems involved in using a dialectical model to theorize political action and revolution. As Grenz writes, "That both the Marxist theory of revolution and Adorno, who criticizes this theory, to the same extent base their arguments on the determinate negation shifts the concept itself into the dilemma of the dialectics of the real versus the dialectics of concepts" (Grenz, p. 77, my translation).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Ilse Müller-Strömsdörfer sees this dilemma as a major contradiction of the dialectical, since dialectics cannot be separated from the moment of synthesis, the sublation [Aufhebung] of opposites. The dialectic is thus a poorly chosen mode for theorizing truly revolutionary changes.<sup>12</sup> Responding to Müller-Strömsdörfer, Grenz sees Adorno's project precisely to be the attempt to free dialectics from the thought of synthesis while retaining the moment of sublation (Grenz, p. 77). For our purposes this attempt must be examined in conjunction with Adorno's aesthetics, a bridge to which is provided by Adorno's contention that "Art works are true in the medium of determinate negation only" (AT, p. 187).<sup>13</sup>

#### Adorno: The Work of Art as Determinate Negation

As we have outlined, Adorno's preoccupation with truth was a driving force in all his philosophical considerations. Equal in magnitude to his zeal for truth, however, was his conviction that society in all its facets, including its language and its concepts, is quintessentially false. The problem thus becomes: by what

means is one to imagine a truth that must emerge from a source completely pervaded by falsehood?

A few possibilities can be ruled out quickly. Because truth does not reside in society as it is, Adorno saw no reason why committed, engaged, or politicized art should accomplish anything toward ameliorating the false conditions of life, a position for which he drew harsh criticism from the more activist Left.<sup>14</sup> But as Adorno wrote, "There is no correct life in falsehood."<sup>15</sup> The answer is also not to be found in Marxist revolution. For Adorno, the key to articulating truth was through the determinate negation of the falsehood of society provided by artworks, a truth that is therefore only negatively expressed.

As a model for such negative expression Adorno took the prohibition in Judaism against pronouncing God's name. As a consequence of this prohibition, man gains the possibility of retaining nonidentity negatively. This means that man can retain a picture of God that, because of the prohibition, is not subject to man's identity thinking. By not permitting man to pronounce God's name, God, the absolute, is protected from imperfect mortal images and human identity thinking, since only negatively constructed images are allowed.<sup>16</sup>

The means by which art expresses truth is analogous to the negatively constructed image of God. If human society is false, completely devoid of truth, and if art is nevertheless to express truth, then artworks certainly cannot be mimetic, for then they could only reflect or re-present the falsehood already present. In addition, art cannot conceptually transmit its truth through any known language or concepts, for these are also tainted and false. Thus, art must reflect without directly expressing something that does not actually exist; in a second step, it falls upon philosophy to articulate art as a determinate negation of society, without, however, defusing art's resistance against society

by forcing a synthesis or a happy ending onto it. Through this step, Adorno identifies a new permutation of the determinate as "immanent criticism," a procedure we will examine in the following chapter.<sup>17</sup> For now, however, let us touch upon that which art can reflect in at least a simulated fashion: the beauty of nature in itself, which is directly related to the beauty of art.

#### The Beauty of Nature and the Beauty of Art

That the beauty of nature and the beauty of art are important components of Adorno's aesthetics appears obvious from the circumstance that the philosopher devotes complete chapters of his Aesthetic Theory to each topic. Such interest in the beauty of nature, however, seems outmoded for an aesthetics of the twentieth century, as Adorno himself concedes. Yet as we will see, Adorno distinguishes between the beauty of nature and the beauty of nature in itself [das Naturschöne an sich], with the latter being a significant realm of Adorno's aesthetics that cannot be directly perceived but which allows art to express truth despite seemingly impossible conditions.

Adorno begins his chapter on the beauty of nature by pointing out that this beauty, which held a position of great importance in the aesthetic theories of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, has gradually been driven out of discussion and replaced by the beauty of art. If one recalls that Kant in his Critique of Judgment (\$42) placed the beauty of nature above that of art, then the rapid decline of philosophical interest in the beauty of nature is quite evident. With Adorno, however, comes a return to a consideration of the beauty of nature with the following justification.

Why was natural beauty dropped from the agenda of aesthetics? The reason is not that it was truly sublated in a higher realm, as Hegel

would have us believe. Rather, the concept of natural beauty was simply repressed. Its continued presence would have touched a sore spot, conjuring up associations of acts of violence perpetrated by every work of art, as a pure artefact, against the natural. Wholly man-made, the work of art is radically opposed to nature, which appears not to be so made. However, in their antithetical opposition the artwork and nature are dependent on each other: nature on the experience of a mediated and objectified world, the artwork on nature which is the mediated plenipotentiary of immediacy. Reflections on natural beauty, therefore, are an integral and inalienable part of any theory of art. (AT, p. 91, translation modified)<sup>18</sup>

That the beauty of nature has been repressed is a direct result of man's antagonistic relationship with nature throughout history, as Adorno, along with Horkheimer, most explicitly outlines in Dialectic of Enlightenment. As the authors point out there, man's drive to dominate nature is a function of his instinct for self-preservation and his fear of nature's power to destroy him. The zenith of this drive to dominate nature Adorno and Horkheimer see in the Enlightenment, when nature becomes solely an object man seeks to control, an attempt that is accompanied by man's forfeiture of his bond with nature. "What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men" (DE, p. 4).<sup>19</sup> This complex manifests itself in man's identity drive, that is, in man's urge to trample over all that is different or nonidentical. According to Adorno, man has reached, at least since the end of the nineteenth century, a level of productive forces that could make possible a liberation from the drive to dominate nature and with it a liberation from domination (Herrschaft) in general. But Adorno remains painfully aware of the gap between the theoretically possible and the practically attainable.

In seeing nature as an Other that man no longer need control, Adorno assigns to nature qualities similar to those of art. In fact, as Thomas Baumester and Jens Kulenkampff mention, Adorno makes use of the concept of nature as a "mere name for every Other."<sup>20</sup> Man's pathological drive to

dominate nature is passionately criticized in Dialectic of Enlightenment, where this condition is characterized by man's obsession with the general to the detriment of the particular. "Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear" (DE, p. 16).<sup>21</sup> ". . . the trajectory of progress, which has ploughed under all that did not conform to identity, is also marked by devastation" (AT, p. 93).<sup>22</sup> Sauerland concisely describes this spirit of the Enlightenment: "Everything different, nonidentical, with outside being, everything incommensurable must be either cut away or explained, classified or grasped by a formula."<sup>23</sup>

To combat such reified thinking, nature and art refuse to be classified, since their essence is negativity. Their enigmatic quality, their refusal to speak or be perceived in conceptual terms marks the power of art and nature. At this point, however, it is important to emphasize that nature is only negatively definable and that the beauty of nature in itself, as Adorno uses it, is nothing but a pure construct. That Adorno can only discuss such characteristics negatively or as constructs, consistent with the ban on graven images, derives directly from his conviction that everything in society is blinded (Verblendet) and false; ". . . the universality of mediation has yet to generate a livable life" (AT, p. 95, translation modified).<sup>24</sup> Thus, if art and nature are to contain truth, they must remain beyond society's ability to articulate them positively: the beauty of nature in itself is not something one can find. Unmediated experience is not possible.

In every perception of nature there is actually present the whole of society. The latter not only provides the patterns of perception in general, but also defines nature a priori in relation to itself. Thus the perception of nature is a product of the faculty of determinate negation. . . . . the immediate experience of nature has become neutralized. As nature becomes synonymous with national parks and wildlife preserves, its beauty is purely tokenistic. Natural beauty is

an ideological notion because it offers mediatedness in the guise of immediacy. (AT, p. 101, translation modified)<sup>25</sup>

The above remarks make it clear that if art is mimetic at all, it reflects neither society nor nature in the form in which either is accessible to us. What art reflects, then, is the beauty of nature in itself (das Naturschöne an sich; think here of Kant's thing in itself, the Ding an sich). "Art imitates neither nature nor individual natural beauty [einzelnes Naturschönes]. What it does imitate is natural beauty in itself [das Naturschöne an sich]" (AT, p. 107, translation modified).<sup>26</sup>

Through the beauty of nature in itself, Adorno provides a way out of the dilemma of how an art that emerges from the blinded sphere of humankind can attain truth content: it takes material from society while at the same time resisting this society; what it reflects through its negativity is a beauty that is analogous to what nature in its negativity produces but cannot articulate. Art reflects a something we cannot perceive directly.

The being-in-itself of art is not an imitation of something real but an anticipation of a being-in-itself yet to come, of an unknown that will determine itself through the subject. Works of art state that there is an in-itself, but they do not spell out what it is. . . . Art would like to realize the articulation of the non-human with human means. (AT, pp. 114-115)<sup>27</sup>

Art is therefore not something that can be positively defined or described. Its locus, however, can at least be suggested based on the reference points of society and nature. Art is the determinate negation of the negativity of society, which does not mean that it is a positive.<sup>28</sup> Art's relation to nature, a nature that silently suffers from the domination man inflicts upon it, is more complementary. Art also suffers, but it differs from nature in being able to lend a voice to suffering. Art thus plays a role that nature perhaps could have, had it

not been rendered silent by man. The negative strength that art must uphold, the battle that nature lost but art still fights, is the battle to resist man's attempts to master, control, or categorize it. Art must remain noncommunicative and enigmatic if it is to retain its negativity; its only hope for survival is its albeit contradictory existence. Art must remain an Other; it must remain asymmetrical not only with society but also with itself, for the asymmetry contained within the work itself also determines negative Erkenntnis. Yet as Adorno points out, artworks in themselves are illusory because they appear as totalities, the other side of their contradictory existence that we discussed in the previous chapter. "Coherence of meaning and oneness are artificial products of the artwork's own making. They do not exist by themselves. Now, as artificial products they negate the being-in-itself which was to have been accomplished through this strategy of making. And ultimately this negates art as a whole" (AT, p. 155).<sup>29</sup>

Artworks' claim to totality is not the only way they become contradictory. The very fact that they posit the possibility of effective intersubjective communication through linguistic expression dooms art's undertakings, for language refuses to cooperate in upholding the delusive contradictions of the empirical world. "The power of language proves itself therein that in reflection expression and thing separate. Language becomes an instance of truth only in the awareness of the nonidentity of expression with that which is meant" (NDk, p. 117, my translation).<sup>30</sup>

#### Competing Models of Negativity in Adorno

Because negativity and negations are such basic concepts in Adorno's aesthetic theory, negativity often comes up in contexts beyond merely negations

of art's origins or art's negative opposition to the world. Indeed the notion of negativity pervades Adorno's texts. This heavy reliance on negativity at times appears to result in competing models of negativity that, although possibly incompatible, often get mixed around. We will touch briefly here on two of the major variations that we will build upon in subsequent chapters.

The first type of negativity Adorno utilizes seems to be the negation of late capitalist society by the artwork as negating monad that resists being categorized or understood. Adorno sees such a negation as having a critical function because, as negation of the status quo, it suggests that something other than the status quo might be desirable. The model Adorno has in mind for this position is artists such as Kafka or Beckett, in whose work positions are only established in order to be negated; what emerges is an eternal series of negations of negations with no solid positions surviving.

In his essay "Ist die Kunst heiter?" (Is art cheerful?) in Noten zur Literatur, for example, Adorno argues that the endless negations of positions in modern art make tragedy and comedy impossible, because both forms rely on privileged positions. In comedy, for instance, we can only laugh (say about the ridiculous aristocratic codes of decorum) if we feel secure in a superior position (say the bourgeois codes of place through accomplishments rather than by right of birth).<sup>31</sup> Tragedy is similar insofar as the eventual collision of positions in the work brings about the negation of one position or the triumph of another position (usually both occur). Thus, without privileged positions the traditional forms of literary art fall by the wayside.<sup>32</sup>

The main thrust of this first model of negativity is thus art as the determinate negation of contemporary society and its governing norms. Art's function is to resist categorization and thereby thwart the dominating advances

of identity thinking. But art characterized by its noncommunicative posture in relation to contemporary society does not necessarily imply a model of reconciliation. It is certainly critical, but to attain reconciliation Adorno introduces a second model of negativity.

The other model of negativity Adorno uses has more to do with the authentic reception of artworks and retains a moment of reconciliation (Versöhnung). The image for this type of reception Adorno presents in Dialectic of Enlightenment as the episode when Odysseus has the opportunity to hear the song of the Sirens. Odysseus comes of age through suffering, forms an identity through rationally separating the present, past, and future. This model seems to assume that in the past unity between man and nature existed, a unity, however, that man forfeited in forming an identity. The promise of the Sirens' song is the happiness of returning to this unity at the cost of losing this painfully won identity. By having himself tied to the mast, Odysseus is able to ponder the song without being able to follow its message; he can experience the desire to return, but through physical bondage he retains his identity. The song is stripped of its power and becomes merely art for contemplation.

This aesthetic experience is also tied up in the existing relationships of power (Machtverhältnisse) because Odysseus can only enjoy the song by numbing his crew's sense abilities (the wax in their ears). Only because they are dominated and excluded from the pleasure can Odysseus enjoy art. With this circumstance begins the break between art and praxis. "The bonds, with which [Odysseus] has irremediably tied himself to practice, also keep the Sirens away from practice: their temptation is neutralized and becomes a mere object of contemplation--becomes art" (DE, p. 34).<sup>33</sup> Thus, the subject's confrontation with art implies a negation of sorts, but it also offers a glimpse of the

immediacy of the past, a promise for reconciliation (here we could think of Benjamin's more theologically oriented notion of reconciliation). While the first model's main component was criticism of contemporary society, this model is chiefly concerned with reconciliation based on the myth of past unity. In short, the first model is critical but does not necessarily contain a theory of reconciliation. The second model theorizes a path to reconciliation but it is not necessarily a critique as determinate negation.

The second model of negativity appears to be the more troublesome one because it can easily lead to questionable premises concerning mediation, which we will discuss in the following chapter. Wolfgang Iser has suggested that this problem may find its way into Adorno's writings because Adorno, like many other Marxists of his era, had no apparatus of terms at his disposal with which to discuss materialist issues in art; Marxists were thus forced to articulate properties of art and aesthetic experience in the classical humanist terms in which they evolved.<sup>34</sup> For this reason, these Marxist aesthetic theoreticians continued to talk about aesthetic experience in the humanist vernacular of "truth" and "reconciliation," words that in the post-structuralist setting sound anachronistic. Marxist thinkers such as Adorno, however, obviously considered such terms indispensable to their program of outlining the distinction between the world of art and the world of mundane experience, and we will examine in the next chapter whether the problem involved more than merely inadequate terms.

#### On Communication

To open this chapter, we referred to Wolfgang Iser's discourse on negativity, which we compared and contrasted with Adorno's use of negativity. To end this chapter, it seems appropriate to consider briefly a major point of discord

between the Rezeptionsästhetiker of the Constance School and Adorno, the issue of art as communication.

Although Adorno and Iser share the position that nonidentity is a basic precondition for mediation, Iser and Jauss call this communication, while Adorno insists, at least in his rhetoric, that art must refuse to communicate. "The only way to get through to reified minds by means of art is to shock them into realizing the phoniness of what a pseudo-scientific terminology likes to call communication. By the same token, art maintains its integrity only by refusing to go along with communication" (AT, p. 443).<sup>35</sup> "What is called 'communication' today is the adaptation of spirit to useful aims and, worse, to commodity fetishism. Similarly, the equally popular term 'meaning' is also enmeshed in these sorry developments" (AT, p. 109).<sup>36</sup>

It is difficult to be certain that Adorno's stance against communication separates him from the Constance School as much as one might think. The stress he places upon art's noncommunicative stance is not inexplicable; by refusing to communicate (at least along traditional lines), art increases its negativity and thus its asymmetry with the empirical world and the perceiving subject. But this desired increase in negativity serves an important purpose, for meaninglessness and noncommunicability posit meaning and communication. Thus, Adorno's attack on communication probably cannot be construed as an attack on the type of communication Iser outlines in his phenomenological descriptions of the literary text. For instance, what Iser calls gaps and negations, that is, structures that determine communication, may be structures that actually enhance a text's noncommunicability in Adorno's terms (we will examine questions such as these more thoroughly in Chapter V).

Adorno's opposition to communication and the hermeneutical tradition appears to be based on his view that to interpret what a text "communicates" or to decipher a text's "meaning" is simultaneously to categorize it, to render it explicable through the conceptual and linguistic apparatus at one's disposal. It is true that Iser relies on concepts and language to discuss texts, but his objective is not to coerce meaning out of a text. Rather, Iser attempts systematically to explain how interaction between text and recipient takes place and how recipients not only arrive at "meanings" but also how recipients are often frustrated in their attempts to determine meaning by negativity structures in the text. Iser is thus no meaning monger, but he does not consider an examination of textual structures and their influence on aesthetic experience to be a taboo subject. Adorno states that art resists communication; Iser looks at how art accomplishes this resistance.

Still, Iser (and to a greater extent Jauss) remain nearer to Gadamer than Adorno. Much of what concerns the Constance School critics is the way in which "sense" (or "non-sense") is communicated in aesthetic experience. Both Iser and Jauss (as opposed to say Stanley Fish) believe that the text plays a role in limiting interpretation and that the text and the recipient interact to co-produce the aesthetic experience. They also believe that such restricting textual structures can be isolated and discussed. (In the case of Jauss, the text can even be used to construct an era's "horizon of expectation" for which no first-hand interpretations remain available.) Adorno's view of the text-recipient relationship is far more ambivalent, as we will see in Chapter V, and it is perhaps his strong reservations about reception and interpretation that lead him to criticize the hermeneutical tradition so harshly.

Adorno writes, for example, "Aesthetics cannot hope to grasp works of art if it treats them as hermeneutical objects. What at present needs to be grasped is their unintelligibility" (AT, p. 173).<sup>37</sup> Of course to grasp unintelligibility is to grasp intelligibility as well. Adorno's target in mind here seems to be the traditional position that art is valuable because it conveys a message or tells a story on the level of content. Such a position has long since been abandoned by hermeneutics. The unintelligibility of modernism is still able to convey something and probably in a very similar manner to Iser's description of how negativity operates. The major difference, then, between modernist and previous art seems to be a matter of distance: modernist art more willingly relinquishes control over its reception (a control that was probably only mythical anyway), as is apparent by what Iser sees as the greater number of gaps of indeterminacy in modern texts. These gaps, which force the reader to sort things out on his own, indicate a shift in art from an emphasis on conveying a specific message found in the content of a story (as in more determinate didactic, pre-autonomous texts) to greater indeterminacy that results from increased formal difficulties, e.g., gaps of indeterminacy, that bring with them more freedom of reception, mediated to a larger extent by form. It is interesting to note that what Adorno and the Constance School critics say about actual artworks is in many ways similar, although the terminology differs. The great disparity is rather the political and philosophical conclusions the respective critics draw from their aesthetic observations, or in Adorno's case, the philosophical views of contemporary society that make his turn to art inevitable. We will have the chance to examine both these similarities and differences in somewhat more detail in Chapter V on reception.

Before that, we will explore more closely the concepts of mediation and conceptuality in Adorno's work in an attempt to understand better how art is uniquely able to convey experiences that cannot be articulated otherwise. We will also examine Adorno's argument for art's ability to circumvent the conceptual structure of cognition, and perhaps more interestingly, reasons why Adorno believes such a circumvention is necessary. In short, Adorno's aesthetics, a key to his entire philosophical program, stresses again and again that human existence and virtually everything connected with it is false. A question thus arises: How is Adorno so sure of life's utter falseness? (After all, revelation of Auschwitz's horrors only confirmed the convictions about humanity Adorno already held.) We will thus look for some of the reference points without which a dialectical mind such as Adorno's could scarcely have posited a position of such uncompromising pessimism.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> This is not a new insight. The Russian formalists used the concept of ostranenie ("making strange") to describe this negativity phenomenon of art. More recently Bertolt Brecht attempted to increase his dramas' negative content through employing Verfremdungseffekte ("alienation effects") in his epic theater. The critic Hans Robert Jauss also turns to negativity in his theory of evaluative literary history through his emphasis on art's "norm-breaking potential" in his pioneering essay "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> "Denken ist, an sich schon, vor allem besonderen Inhalt Negieren, Resistenz gegen das ihm Aufgedrängte," Theodor W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 19; all subsequent English citations from Negative Dialectics are, unless otherwise stated, from this translation with the abbreviation ND and the corresponding page numbers given in parentheses. Modifications to this translation, when necessary, will also be noted. In notes will appear the corresponding passages from the original German from Negativ Dialektik, Vol. VI of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1973) and abbreviated NDK; the present quote is from NDK, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> "Der Nerv der Dialektik als Methode ist die bestimmte Negation." In Theodor W. Adorno, Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie; Drei Studien zu Hegel, Vol. V of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 318.

<sup>5</sup> For a much more detailed discussion of the determinate negation and the determinate nothing in Hegel, Marx, and Adorno, see Friedemann Grenz, "Die bestimmte Negation als Ort der Wahrheit und die These von der rückwirkenden Kraft der Erkenntnis," in: Adornos Philosophie in Grundbegriffen: Auflösung einiger Deutungsprobleme; Mit einem Anhang: Theodor W. Adorno und Arnold Gehlen: Ist die Soziologie eine Wissenschaft vom Menschen? Ein Streitgespräch (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 75-116; abbreviated hereafter as Grenz.

<sup>6</sup> See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Wissenschaft der Logik, Erster Teil, Vol. V of Werke in zwanzig Bänden (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1969), p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> "Das Einzige, um den wissenschaftlichen Fortgang zu gewinnen . . . ist die Erkenntnis des logischen Satzes, daß das Negative ebenso sehr positiv ist oder daß das sich Widersprechende sich nicht in Null, in das abstrakte Nichts auflöst, sondern wesentlich nur in die Negation seines besonderen Inhalts, oder daß eine solche Negation nicht alle Negation, sondern die Negation der bestimmten Sache, die sich auflöst, somit bestimmte Negation ist; daß also im Resultate wesentlich das enthalten ist, woraus es resultiert,--was eigentlich eine Tautologie ist, denn sonst wäre es ein Unmittelbares, nicht ein Resultat. Indem das Resultierende, die Negation, bestimmte Negation ist, hat sie einen Inhalt. Sie ist ein neuer Begriff, aber der höhere, reichere Begriff als der vorhergehende; denn sie ist um dessen Negation oder Entgegengesetztes reicher geworden, enthält ihn also, aber auch mehr als ihn, und ist die Einheit seiner und seines Entgegengesetzten.--In diesem Wege hat sich das System der Begriffe überhaupt zu bilden--und in unaufhaltsamem, reinem, von außen nichts hereinnehmendem Gange sich zu vollenden."

<sup>8</sup> "Was sich aufhebt, wird dadurch nicht zu Nichts. Nichts ist das Unmittelbare; ein Aufgehobenes dagegen ist ein Vermitteltes, es ist das Nichtseiente, aber als Resultat, das von einem Sein ausgegangen ist; es hat daher die Bestimmtheit, aus der es herkommt, noch an sich."

<sup>9</sup> "So ist das Aufgehobene ein zugleich Aufbewahrtes, das nur seine Unmittelbarkeit verloren hat, aber darum nicht vernichtet ist."

<sup>10</sup> "Wenn der Terminus 'bestimmte Negation' in seiner Lehre überhaupt einen Platz haben soll, heißt ihr Objektbereich bei Marx: Klassengesellschaft. Aufheben ihrer heißt: Liquidation ihres Klassencharakters, Bewahren ihres Gesellschaftscharakters. 'Bestimmt' heißt, daß die Klassengesellschaft in ihrer vorliegenden Form, der Kapitalismus also, praktisch, durch die Tat von Menschen, aufgehoben wird: liquidiert in ihren Produktionsverhältnissen, bewahrt in ihren Produktivkräften. Entscheidend ist daran, daß die Produktivkräfte nicht allein zurückbleiben können, sondern das bestimmte Nichts der Klassengesellschaft neue Produktionsverhältnisse zu seinem Inhalt haben muß, will es das Resultat einer bestimmten Negation sein."

<sup>11</sup> "Daß sich die marxistische Revolutionstheorie und der sie kritisierende Adorno gleichermaßen auf die bestimmte Negation berufen, rückt den Begriff selbst in das Dilemma von Real- und Begriffslogik."

<sup>12</sup> Ilse Müller-Strömsdörfer, "Die 'helfende Kraft bestimmter Negation': zum Werke Th. W. Adornos," Philosophische Rundschau: Eine vierteljährsschrift für philosophische Kritik, Vol. 8 (1960), pp. 81-105. Grenz also refers to this article.

<sup>13</sup> "Keine Wahrheit der Kunstwerke ohne bestimmte Negation" (AT, p. 195).

<sup>14</sup> See endnote 36 in the previous chapter for a listing of a few sources that discuss this problem. See also Adorno's essay "Engagement" in Noten zur Literatur, pp. 409-430; this essay appears in English and is discussed in Aesthetics and Politics.

<sup>15</sup> "Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen" (Minima Moralia, p. 43, my translation).

<sup>16</sup> In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Horkheimer write: "Jewish religion allows no word that would alleviate the despair of all that is mortal. It associates hope only with the prohibition against calling on what is false as God, against invoking the finite as the infinite, lies as truth. The guarantee of salvation lies in the rejection of any belief that would replace it: it is knowledge obtained in the denunciation of illusion. Admittedly, the negation is not abstract. The contesting of every positive without distinction, the stereotype formula of vanity, as used by Buddhism, sets itself above the prohibition against naming the Absolute with names: just as far above as its contrary, pantheism; or its caricature, bourgeois skepticism. Explanations of the world as all or nothing are mythologies, and guaranteed roads to redemption are sublimated magic practices. The self-satisfaction of knowing in advance and the transfiguration of negativity into redemption are untrue forms of resistance against deception. The justness of the image is preserved in the faithful pursuit of its prohibition. This pursuit, 'determinate negativity' does not receive from the sovereignty of the abstract concept any immunity against corrupting intuition, as does skepticism, to which both true and false are equally vain. Determinate negation rejects the defective ideas of the absolute, the idols, differently than does rigorism, which confronts them with the Idea that they cannot match up to. Dialectic, on the contrary, interprets every image as writing. It shows how the admission of its falsity is to be read in the lines of its features--a confession that deprives it of its power and appropriates it for truth. With the notion of determinate negativity, Hegel revealed an element that distinguishes the Enlightenment from the positivist degeneracy to which he attributes it. By ultimately making the conscious result of the whole process of negation--totality in system and history--into an absolute, he of course contravened the prohibition and himself lapsed into mythology" Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), pp. 23-24; hereafter abbreviated as DE. ["Die jüdische Religion duldet kein Wort, das der Verzweiflung alles Sterblichen Trost gewährte. Hoffnung knüpft sie einzig ans Verbot, das Falsche als Gott anzurufen, das Endliche als das Unendliche, die Lüge als Wahrheit. Das Unterpfand der Rettung liegt in der Abwendung von allem Glauben, der sich ihr untersiebt, die Erkenntnis in der Denunziation des Wahns. Die Verneinung freilich ist nicht abstrakt. Die unterschiedslose Bestreitung jedes Positiven, die stereotype Formel der Nichtigkeit, wie der Buddhismus sie anwendet, setzt sich über das Verbot, das Absolute mit Namen zu nennen, ebenso hinweg wie sein Gegenteil, der Pantheismus, oder seine Fratze, die bürgerliche Skepsis. Die Erklärungen der Welt als des Nichts oder Alls sind Mythologien und die garantierten Pfade zur Erlösung sublimierte magische Praktiken. Die Selbstzufriedenheit des Vorwegbescheidwissens und die Verklärung der Negativität zur Erlösung sind unwahre Formen des Widerstands gegen den Betrug. Gerettet wird das Recht des Bildes in der treuen Durchführung seines Verbots. Solche

Durchführung, 'bestimmte Negation', ist nicht durch die Souveränität des abstrakten Begriffs gegen die verführende Anschauung gefreit, so wie das Skepsis es ist, der das Falsche wie das Wahre als richtig gilt. Die bestimmte Negation verwirft die unvollkommenen Vorstellungen des Absoluten, die Götzen, nicht wie der Rigorismus, indem sie ihnen die Idee entgegenhält, der sie nicht genügen können. Dialektik offenbart vielmehr jedes Bild als Schrift. Sie lehrt aus seinen Zügen das Eingeständnis seiner Falschheit lesen, das ihn seine Macht entzieht und sie der Wahrheit zueignet. Damit wird die Sprache mehr als ein bloßes Zeichensystem. Mit dem Begriff der bestimmten Negation hat Hegel ein Element hervorgehoben, das Aufklärung von dem positivistischen Zerfall unterscheidet, dem er sie zurechnet. Indem er freilich das gewußte Resultat des gesamten Prozesses der Negation: die Totalität in System und Geschichte schließlich doch zum Absoluten mache, verstieß er gegen das Verbot und verfiel selbst der Mythologie." Dialektik der Aufklärung, Vol III of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1981), pp. 40-41; hereafter abbreviated as DA.]

<sup>17</sup> The movement in Adorno's argument from determinant negation to immanent criticism is highly complex. To provide a detailed examination of all the facets of negativity in Adorno's work would go beyond the scope of the present study. For a good summary of these complicated issues, see Grenz, pp. 57-116.

<sup>18</sup> "Der Theorie ist das Naturschöne . . . kaum mehr thematisch. Schwerlich jedoch deshalb, weil es, nach Hegels Lehre, tatsächlich in einem Höheren aufgehoben wäre: es wurde verdrängt. Der Begriff des Naturschönen röhrt an eine Wunde, und wenig fehlt, daß man sie mit der Gewalt zusammendrückt, die das Kunstwerk, reines Artefakt, dem Naturwüchsigen schlägt. Ganz und gar von Menschen gemacht, steht es seinem Anschein nach nicht Gemachtem, der Natur, gegenüber. Als pure Antithesen aber sind beide aufeinander verwiesen: Natur auf die Erfahrung einer vermittelten, vergegenständlichten Welt, das Kunstwerk auf Natur, den vermittelten Statthalter von Unmittelbarkeit. Darum ist die Besinnung über das Naturschöne der Kunsttheorie unabdingbar" (AT, pp. 97-98).

<sup>19</sup> "Was die Menschen von der Natur lernen wollen, ist, sie anzuwenden, um sie und die Menschen vollends zu beherrschen" (DA, p. 20). Karol Sauerland also cites this sentence in her helpful summary of Adorno's concept of the beauty of nature in Einführung in die Ästhetik Adornos, pp. 81-91. Adorno and Horkheimer believe that such "enlightened" thinking began much earlier than the period known as the "Enlightenment." In fact the very first myths, ideological attempts to explain or defuse the inexplicable and potentially dangerous, mark the beginning of enlightenment: ". . . myth is already enlightenment" (DE, p. xvi) [". . . "schon der Mythos ist Aufklärung" (DA, p. 6).]

<sup>20</sup> "bloßen Namen für alles Andere," Thomas Baumeister and Jens Kulenkampff, "Geschichtsphilosophie und philosophische Ästhetik. Zu Adornos 'Ästhetischer Theorie,'" Neue Hefte für Philosophie, No. 5: Ist eine philosophische Ästhetik möglich? (1973), p. 83, my translation.

21 "Es darf überhaupt nichts mehr draußen sein, weil die bloße Vorstellung des Draußen die eigentliche Quelle der Angst ist" (DA, p. 32).

22 "... die Bahn dieses Fortschritts, der alles unterwarf, was nicht solcher Identität willfährte, war auch eine der Verwüstung" (AT, p. 99). One should perhaps mention at this juncture that Adorno firmly believed that the horror of Auschwitz, the attempts of the Nazis to annihilate Jews, was directly related to man's identity drive, the compulsion to destroy that which was different. For more on this, see Arnold Künzli, Aufklärung und Dialektik; Politische Philosophie von Hobbes bis Adorno (Freiburg: Rombach, 1971).

23 "Alles Andersartige, Nichtidentische, Draußen Seiende, alles Inkommensurable muß entweder weggeschnitten oder erklärt, klassifiziert und unter eine Formel gebracht werden" (Sauerland, p. 84, my translation).

24 "... die Universalität der Vermittlung [ist] nicht umgeschlagen in lebendiges Leben" (AT, p. 102).

25 "... in einer jeglichen [Erfahrung] von der Natur steckt eigentlich die gesamte Gesellschaft. Nicht nur stellt sie die Schemata der Perzeption bei, sondern stiftet vorweg durch Kontrast und Ähnlichkeit, was jeweils Natur heißt. Naturerfahrung wird mitkonstituiert durchs Vermögen bestimmter Negation. . . . Die unmittelbare Naturerfahrung, ihrer kritischen Spitze ledig und dem Tauschverhältnis--das Wort Fremdenindustrie steht dafür ein--subsumiert, wurde unverbindlich neutral und apologetisch: Natur zum Naturschutzwald und zum Alibi. Ideologie ist das Naturschöne als Subreption von Unmittelbarkeit durchs Vermittelte" (AT, p. 107).

26 "Kunst ahmt nicht Natur nach, auch nicht einzelnes Naturschönes, doch das Naturschöne an sich" (AT, p. 113).

27 "Das Ansichsein, dem die Kunstwerke nachhängen, ist nicht Imitation eines Wirklichen sondern Vorwegnahme eines Ansichseins, das noch gar nicht ist, eines Unbekannten und durchs Subjekt hindurch sich Bestimmenden. . . . Kunst möchte mit menschlichen Mitteln das Sprechen des nicht Menschlichen realisieren" (AT, p. 121). This quote is an unfortunate example of a thought that in German is rather clear but, when rendered into English, becomes somewhat cryptic, mainly because of a literal translation of compound German nouns. I believe a gloss on these words would be helpful. The "being-in-itself" is merely a literal translation of the word "Ansichsein." If we recall the connection we made between the beauty of nature in itself (Das Naturschöne an sich) and Kant's thing-in-itself (Ding an sich), then the construction may become easier to grasp. The beauty of nature "an sich," or "in itself," like the thing in itself, must remain a construct because we cannot perceive it. Art reflects this construct, this something. When Adorno wants to refer to this something, he

calls it an "Ansichsein," which, for lack of a better word, becomes in English being-in-itself.

Another aspect of this quote I believe requires comment as well, for in it Adorno seems somewhat atypically optimistic about the eventual arrival of the "being-in-itself" that art anticipates. Adorno's position on this issue does not seem to completely rule out such an eventuality; however I do not believe Adorno considered it inevitable. See "The Hunger for Wholeness" in Chapter IV below. As I argue there, I believe Adorno's ambivalence toward normative totality in his aesthetics has to do with the competing models of negativity he employs.

<sup>28</sup> On this point Adorno was emphatic in his criticism of Hegel's premise that the negation of a negative is a positive, for this only promoted the identity thinking against which Adorno was struggling. "The nonidentical is not to be obtained directly, as something positive on its part, nor is it obtainable by a negation of the negative. This negation is not an affirmation in itself, as it is to Hegel. . . . To equate the negation of negation with positivity is the quintessence of identification; it is the formal principle in its purist form. What wins out in the inmost core of dialectics is the anti-dialectical principle: that traditional logic which, more arithmetic, takes minus times minus for a plus. It was borrowed from that very mathematics to which Hegel reacts so idiosyncratically elsewhere. If the whole is the spell, if it is the negative, a negative of particularities—epitomized in that whole—remains negative. Its only positive side would be criticism, determinate negation; it would not be a circumventing result with a happy grasp on affirmation" (ND, pp. 158-159, translation modified). ["Unmittelbar ist das Nichtidentische nicht als seinerseits Positives zu gewinnen und auch nicht durch Negation des Negativen. Diese ist nicht selbst, wie bei Hegel, Affirmation. . . . Die Gleichsetzung der Negation der Negation mit Positivität ist die Quintessenz des Identifizierens, das formale Prinzip auf seine reinsten Form gebracht. Mit ihm gewinnt im Innersten von Dialektik das anti-dialektische Prinzip die Oberhand, jene traditionelle Logik, welche more arithmetic minus mal minus als plus verbucht. Sie ward jener Mathematik abgeborgt, gegen die Hegel sonst so idiosynkratisch reagiert. Ist das Ganze der Bann, das Negative, so bleibt die Negation der Partikularitäten, die ihren Inbegriff an jenem Ganzen hat, negativ. Ihr Positives wäre allein die bestimmte Negation, Kritik, kein umspringendes Resultat, das Affirmation glücklich in Händen hielte" (NDK, p. 161).] See also Norbert Rath, "Kritik als Negation," in Adornos Kritische Theorie, pp. 108-114, and M. Puder, "Zur 'Ästhetischen Theorie' Adornos," Neue Rundschau, 82 (1971), pp. 465-477.

<sup>29</sup> "Sinnzusammenhang, Einheit wird von den Kunstwerken veranstaltet, weil sie nicht ist, und als veranstaltete das Ansichsein negiert, um dessentwillen die Veranstaltung unternommen wird--am Ende die Kunst selbst" (AT, p. 162).

<sup>30</sup> "Die Kraft der Sprache bewährt sich darin, daß in der Reflexion Ausdruck und Sache auseinander treten. Sprache wird zur Instanz von Wahrheit nur am Bewußtsein der Unidentität des Ausdrucks mit dem Gemeinten." Post-structuralist thought has more recently made great contributions toward questioning many of the traditional notions of language and communication and

critics have already noticed some of the affinities between Adorno's negative aesthetic theory and post-structuralism. Terry Eagleton, for instance, writes in his Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism: "The parallels between deconstruction and Adorno are particularly striking. Long before the current fashion, Adorno was insisting on the power of those heterogeneous fragments that slip through the conceptual net, rejecting all philosophy of identity, refusing class consciousness as objectionably 'positive,' and denying the intentionality of signification. Indeed there is hardly a theme in contemporary deconstruction that is not richly elaborated in his work--a pointer, perhaps, to the mutual insularity of French and German culture, which now, ironically, converge more and more only in the Anglo-Saxon world" (p. 141). Martin Jay, Adorno, outlines concrete historical reasons for the cross pollination between Adorno's work and post-structuralist thought. Jay cites Benjamin's connection with the circle of proto-deconstructionists in Paris in the 1930s (Georges Bataille, Pierre Klossowski, Roger Caillois and Michel Leiris) as a possible reason for the parallels (p. 21).

<sup>31</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Ist die Kunst heiter?", in Noten zur Literatur, Vol. XI of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 599-606.

<sup>32</sup> Fredric Jameson provides a perhaps desirable defense of this model of negativity's critical element which Adorno does not always articulate forcefully. As mentioned earlier, this model of negativity has affinities to the Russian Formalist concept of ostranenie, but as Jameson explains, there is a difference: "... it seems to me that even such aesthetic concepts as the ostranenie or 'making-strange' of Russian Formalism (as well as its American version, 'make it new'), indeed the profound drive everywhere in modern art toward a renewal of our perception of the world, are but manifestations, in aesthetic form and on the aesthetic level, of the movement of dialectical consciousness as an assault on our conventionalized life patterns, a whole battery of shocks administered to our routine vision of things, an implicit critique and restructuration of our habitual consciousness. What distinguishes such concepts philosophically from genuine dialectical thinking is of course their failure to account for the initial numbness of our perception in the first place, their inability to furnish a sufficiently historical explanation for the ontological deficiency which they can only understand in ethical and aesthetic terms. Yet such intellectual distortion, such structural repression of an essential element in the situation, is amply accounted for by the Marxist theory of ideology, which posits a kind of resistance or mauvaise foi that grows ever stronger as we draw closer and closer to that truth of the socio-economic which, were it realized in all its transparency, would immediately oblige us to praxis," Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 373-74. This view of how Marxism differs in its treatment of ostensibly aesthetic and nonpolitical phenomena could be offered as a partial answer to those who charged that Adorno believed that theory itself was a kind of praxis. It seems clear, however, that Adorno was more pessimistic than Jameson about the fruits action might bear.

<sup>33</sup> "Die Bande, mit denen er sich unwiderruflich an die Praxis gefesselt hat, halten zugleich die Sirenen aus der Praxis fern: ihre Lockung wird zum bloßen Gegenstand der Kontemplation neutralisiert, zur Kunst" (DA, p. 51).

<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang Iser made this statement in a personal conversation with me, for which I thank him.

<sup>35</sup> "Künsterlich zu erreichen sind die Menschen überhaupt nur noch durch den Schock, der dem einen Schlag erteilt, was die pseudowissenschaftliche Ideologie Kommunikation nennt; Kunst ihrerseits ist integer einzig, wo sie bei der Kommunikation nicht mitspielt" (ÄT, p. 476).

<sup>36</sup> "Denn Kommunikation ist die Anpassung des Geistes an das Nützliche, durch welche er sich unter die Waren einreihet, und was heute Sinn heißt, partizipiert an diesem Unwesen" (ÄT, p. 115).

<sup>37</sup> "Kunstwerke sind nicht von der Ästhetik als hermeneutische Objekte zu begreifen: zu begreifen wäre, auf dem gegenwärtigen Stand, ihre Unbegreiflichkeit" (ÄT, p. 179).

## CHAPTER IV

### MEDIATION AND CONCEPTUALITY: FUNCTION AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the fundamental features of negativity lies in our inability to express or describe it directly, or, to paraphrase Wolfgang Iser's observation at the beginning of Chapter III, in our inability to explain it without rendering it obsolete by mastering it discursively. We are thus faced with the task of suggesting a technique, almost a heuristic means, with which we can translate negatively constructed phenomena into terms that we can discern and discuss. The construct we will suggest for this purpose is mediation, which, in the negative aesthetics of Adorno is probably just as overtaxed as negativity, as both terms are often used in multitudes of ways. The first use of mediation that we will discuss, however, has to do with the very problem we have laid out: rendering manifest negative expression. As we shall see, this function makes clear why negativity and mediation are so closely related, indeed why negativity is hardly useful without some notion of mediation.

Fredric Jameson offers in both Marxism and Form and The Political Unconscious thoughtful comments contributing to a good operational definition of mediation in this sense, which he describes in the latter work as a process of "transcoding."

The practice of "mediation" is then . . . understood as a more seemingly dialectical but no less idealistic mechanism for moving or modulating from one level or feature of the whole to another. . . . . [T]he concept of mediation has traditionally been the way in which dialectical philosophy and Marxism itself have formulated their

vocation to break out of the specialized compartments of the (bourgeois) disciplines and to make connections among the seemingly disparate phenomena of social life generally. If a more modern characterization of mediation is wanted, we will say that this operation is understood as a process of transcoding: as the invention of a set of terms, the strategic choice of a particular code or language, such that the same terminology can be used to analyze and articulate two quite distinct types of objects or "texts," or two very different structural levels of reality. (Political Unconscious, pp. 28 and 40)

If we consider the many levels existing in Adorno's aesthetics between truth--mediated as a partial mimesis of the beauty of nature in itself by art and in turn articulated by philosophy in the process of criticism--and the recipient, then it becomes evident that a great deal of transcoding is involved. But this is not the whole story, since the recipient's perceptions themselves are dominated by the reified categories of the administered world, which makes the whole question of reception a difficult one too (this problem we will reserve for the next chapter). Moreover, the language and concepts of philosophy are also suspect, since they reflect the entire identity drive of Western metaphysics that Adorno seriously questions.<sup>1</sup>

The task that we have set ourselves thus involves the challenge of documenting to some extent how Adorno imagines these vast mediations. This endeavor is further complicated by the fact that in Adorno's scheme mediation is not limited to a transcoding carried out by the critic to talk about art's truth (although this is part of it), for in addition to this, art itself is assigned the function of mediating or transcoding raw material into something that can be discerned as truth; in this regard, artists, in their struggle to resolve formal problems that the material presents them, are also mediators. Another problem we must take up has to do with the feasibility of the arguments Adorno makes for nonconceptual mediation and his tacit admission of at least a heuristic unmediated experience into his program.

To explore these questions we will first take up Adorno's distinction between aesthetic and empirical objects, on which so much of his aesthetic theory is based. We will then try to discover if Adorno's turn to art for truth reveals a "hunger for wholeness" (perhaps to be expected of a thinker in the German tradition) that has implications for mediation and negativity. Thereafter we will look more closely at how artistic production according to Adorno implies mediation between art and society through the artist's confrontation with artistic material. We will then close the chapter with a brief introduction to issues of reception to be taken up in the following chapter.

#### Aesthetic and Empirical Objects

To outline the role of mediation in the relationship between art objects and perceiving subjects is difficult enough. More difficult, however, becomes distinguishing between the aesthetic perception of art objects and the discursive knowledge of empirical objects after one has postulated (as most aesthetic theorists including Adorno do) that artistic objects possess unique epistemological qualities and reside in a privileged ontic sphere. While we can probably agree that all experience is mediated, this consensus becomes difficult to uphold as soon as we look to art objects to provide us with more insight than, say, dishwashers. At that point, the temptation arises to posit that art can be experienced somehow more directly, more immediately than empirical objects. In Adorno's work, for example, words such as nonconceptual and sensuous often pop up in discussions of artworks, discussions that at least imply that artworks evoke types of perception differing from the perception of mundane empirical objects. Let us sketch out some of these passages.

For one thing, in Adorno's scheme art is not rational; this characteristic allows art to become the language of suffering.

. . . something on the other side of reality's veil--a veil woven by the interaction of institutions and false needs--objectively demands art; demands an art that speaks for that which the veil obscures. While discursive knowledge reaches toward reality and also its irrationalities that stem from reality's law of motion, something in art resists rational understanding [Erkenntnis]. However, rational cognition has one critical limit which is its estrangement and separation from suffering. Reason can subsume suffering under concepts; it can furnish means to alleviate suffering; but it can never express suffering in the medium of experience, for to do so would be irrational by reason's own standards. Suffering understood as a concept remains mute and inconsequential. (AT, p. 27, translation modified)<sup>2</sup>

This statement suggests that not only does the perception of art differ from that of empirical objects; the distinction also extends to how artistic knowledge and discursive knowledge "understand reality." Discursive knowledge, being rational, deals with reality by resorting to concepts. Art, however, in Adorno's view, can not only understand but also convey in the medium of experience sentiments such as suffering nonconceptually.

Seen in this way, art does have a less mediated relationship to repressed aspects of reality than does discursive knowledge, because art circumvents the conceptual apparatus of that knowledge. But exactly through such circumvention this immediacy becomes, similar to a thing in itself, something that remains outside our representations. That is, this immediacy can only be postulated or negatively defined. It is not something humans can ever perceive directly, although Adorno suggests (as we point out in Chapter VI below) that forms such as the critical essay can at least provide for a transcoding to take place that allows the chain of immediacy to be extended from the beauty of nature in itself through the artwork to the critical essay itself. The final product, the critical essay, can be viewed as an autonomous form that helps to articulate the beauty

of nature in itself art conveys without destroying it through categorization. The essay, as we will see in Chapter VI, thus emits imperfect rays of immediacy that only the form itself, not the human subject, can perceive.

Whether art in fact mediates recognition in a different way than empirical objects thus does not appear to be an easy question to answer, but Adorno at least theorizes that this distinction exists. This of course does not mean that art allows perceiving subjects to avoid mediation, since they are buried under the concepts, language, indeed mediations of the administered world. Thus if there is an immediacy, it exists in the relationship between the beauty of nature in itself and art (and between art and the critical essay), hermetically sealed away from direct human perception or production (which may explain why Adorno stresses form over content, unconscious activities of the artist over conscious intention, music over more content-laden art forms).

But what about how empirical and artistic objects themselves are perceived? Is there a distinction to be made here? Apparently so, as far as Adorno is concerned. Although some of his formulations about art are cautiously expressed, Adorno nevertheless seems to see art's unique power as at least approaching sensuousness and nonconceptuality. "The mainspring of art is the fact that the immediate sensuous presence of art's enchanting quality, which is a vestige of its magical phase, is constantly repudiated by the demystification of the real world without being entirely erased" (AT, p. 86, translation modified).<sup>3</sup> This quote seems to indicate that while art cannot be experienced immediately, it at least negatively, in its resistance to the empirical world, retains a memory of immediate experience. This memory, however, since it must be thought, can only be imagined through mediated and conceptual understanding which make the

aesthetic experience an intellectual comprehension of this memory as negativity.

In reference to music, for example, Adorno writes:

In all its genres, art is permeated by intellective moments. Suffice it to mention only one example here. The great musical forms would never have come to pass without intellection, without listening in context backward and forward, without synthesizing what is separate. It may be argued that these functions belong to sensuous immediacy, and this is indeed true inasmuch as the parts presently before the listener carry with them Gestalt qualities of what went before and what comes after. But this argument only goes so far. Sooner or later works of art reach thresholds where that immediacy ends and where they need to be "thought," not in the medium of extraneous reflection, but in themselves. This means that intellective mediation is an integral part of the sensuous complexion of works and determines the way they are perceived. (AT, pp. 132-33, translation modified)<sup>4</sup>

Adorno thus retains in his aesthetic a place for an immediacy between art and reality. One could perhaps formulate it so: art becomes the means by which elements of reality that would otherwise be lost are transcoded or mediated into forms that are more compatible with our receptor codes. The distance between the recipient and truth is reduced but not overcome.

We might ask if art's ontological properties as Adorno describes them, primarily through negativity, are adequate to justify this almost magical transcoding. Does it seem plausible, for example, that art as resistance, as non-communication, as negativity, or as dialectics without synthesis is enough to allow such a transcoding to take place? And is aesthetic experience actually capable of transmitting to us the memory of a reconciled world? For the moment, we cannot answer these questions. Instead, we will begin by examining possible origins of this posited memory.

The "Hunger for Wholeness"

On the issue of what Peter Gay calls the "hunger for wholeness," major Adorno commentators such as Martin Jay seem almost as ambivalent as Adorno himself.<sup>5</sup> Such a hunger for wholeness seems generally to be reflected in idealized views of past harmony and plenitude combined with a utopian strand of rediscovering or recreating such harmony at some point in the future; an important corollary to this yearning for something better in the past or future is an utter dissatisfaction with the present.

Jay seems to believe that Adorno harbored no illusions about a past of wholeness and only weak and intermittent desires for a harmonious future. "For all his own interest in the liberating power of remembrance, which he shared with other members of the Frankfurt School, Adorno steadfastly refused to succumb to any nostalgia for a prehistorical era of plenitude and harmony" (Adorno, p. 63). And in a footnote to his article on totality, Jay quotes Adorno on Lukács to support his claim:

The meaningful times for whose return the early Lukács yearned were as much due to reification, to inhuman situations, as he would later attest it only to the bourgeois age. Contemporary representations of medieval towns usually look as if an execution were just taking place to cheer the populace. If any harmony of subject and object should have prevailed in those days, it was a harmony like the most recent one: pressure-born and brittle. The transfiguration of past conditions serves the purpose of a late, superfluous denial that is experienced as a no-exit situation; only as lost conditions do they become glamorous. Their cult, the cult of pre-subjective phases, arose in horror, in the age of individual disintegration and collective regression. (ND, p. 191)

Commenting on this quote, Jay offers generational differences between Lukács and Adorno to explain the latter's supposed lack of nostalgia for an idealized past.

Lukács' nostalgia for a lost past and Adorno's lack of the same might well have something to do with their respective ages. Lukács was born in 1885 into a wealthy, patrician family; Adorno's family background was no less fortunate, but he was born in 1903. Thus, whereas Lukács matured in an environment that still seemed relatively secure, even if bourgeois culture as a whole was in decline, Adorno came of age during the war when it had completely collapsed. Like Brecht, who was roughly of the same generation, he had no nostalgia for a prewar era, which may account for their common interest in the modernist art that Lukács abhorred. (Jay, "The Concept of Totality," p. 129)

A dissenting opinion concerning the presence of nostalgia for a lost past in Adorno's work is offered by David H. Miles, who sees in The Dialectics of Enlightenment "strong traces of a Lukácsian nostalgia for a nonindustrial, nonalienated age" as reflecting Adorno's German Idealist roots.<sup>6</sup> And about Adorno's essay on the novel, "Narrative Perspective in the Contemporary Novel," Miles writes:

By "contemporary" novel Adorno actually meant the novels of Proust, Gide, Joyce, and Kafka, and by "perspective" he was referring primarily to the intolerably subjective narrative stance of these writers. Thus he did Lukács and Hegel one better by finding modern novels not just "godless" and "middle-class" but also "negative" epics, ones in which the heroes, as well as the most ordinary, everyday characters, have been "liquidated" by excessive Reflexion. . . . The novel's subject matter, accordingly, had become a negative world in which "alienation" transmogrifies all human qualities into what is simply more "lubricating oil for the smooth performance of the social machinery." One does not have to be a close reader to get the point here: unalienated man for Adorno obviously inhabits a preindustrial, agrarian culture. Thus, despite his infinite adeptness at navigating between philosophical extremes, Adorno's underlying pessimism about modernism—which begins with the Enlightenment—puts him virtually in the same camp as Lukács and Benjamin, although without their eschatological frameworks. (pp. 30-31)

While Miles' remarks about Adorno seem to refute Jay's statement, Miles' position also needs some correction. Dialectic of Enlightenment does offer a view of nonalienated harmony; in this point I think Miles is right and Jay wrong.

For more evidence of Adorno's position on man's past relation to the objective world, a position I believe is for important reasons ambivalent, we can also look to Aesthetic Theory. In one instance, for example, Adorno writes ". . . works of art salvage, albeit in neutralized fashion, something that once upon a time was literally a shared experience of all mankind and which enlightenment has since expelled" (AT, p. 8).<sup>7</sup> Or in another place, Adorno writes "On and through the trajectory of rationality, mankind becomes aware through art of what rationality has erased from memory" (AT, p. 99).<sup>8</sup> Yet Adorno cautions that aesthetic appreciation of nature ". . . represents the recollection of a non-repressive condition that probably never existed" (AT, p. 98, translation modified).<sup>9</sup> One thing about a past of plenitude and harmony, however, is clear: if it did exist--and I think this is an interesting question to ask about the ideological and historical assumptions of Adorno and other Marxists in the German Idealist tradition--it cannot be a place to which we can return, since man did become self-reflexive (in this point, I believe Miles greatly overstates Adorno's interest in past wholeness to squeeze him into the Lukácsian and German Idealist tradition).<sup>10</sup>

This is where Adorno's positions on past and future begin to dovetail. Adorno's view is that the development of man's subjectivity and "enlightened" thinking was a necessary stage through which man passed. It is not possible for man to simply forget this identity, and this would also not be desirable. The task Adorno sees is thus to bring self-reflexive man into a new setting of harmony in which domination does not exist. As Günter Rohrmoser puts it, "A large part of Theodor W. Adorno's intellectual effort concerns the attempt to say how man's relationship to nature, from which man in history has emancipated himself, must be conceived" (Das Elend der kritischen Theorie, p. 25, my

translation).<sup>11</sup> This harmony, however, would be qualitatively different from the postulated harmony of pre-alienated society, for it presupposes a human that remains aware of his own subject and objects too, with neither dominating the other. As to the possibility of reaching such a state, Adorno seems to have been pessimistic at best, which is reflected in commentators' observations.

Rohrmoser writes for example: "If the Whole is false, then the possibility of changing the totally false must be at least possible or conceivable. Yet Adorno says that there is no such possibility in the present" (Das Elend der kritischen Theorie, p. 29, my translation).<sup>12</sup> Rohrmoser thus sees no way out of the deadlock, no source for a change in the present circumstances. Martin Jay offers a somewhat more moderate view of this issue, which he calls "normative totality."

Despite the clear pessimism of his vision, Adorno did not entirely abandon the idea of an integrated, reconciled totality in the future. In at least two places in Negative Dialectics, he permitted himself to indulge his own, albeit faint, "hunger for wholeness." In a section entitled "Noncontradictoriness Not To Be Hypostatized," he wrote:

"Dialectical reason's own essence has come to be and will pass, like antagonistic society" (ND, p. 141). And in his closing remarks, he adopted a view reminiscent of Ernst Bloch in saying that "it lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total. This is its form of hope" (ND, p. 406). Despite these isolated comments, however, it is clear that the concept of totality did not become an affirmative category in his thought, but remained a perpetually critical one. ("The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno," p. 134)<sup>13</sup>

What should be asked of the "hunger for wholeness" model, it seems to me, is whether the notion of such a prealienated world is a legitimate model for desirable changes in contemporary society. In short, what do such preoccupations with past and future have to do with the present in general, and specifically, Adorno's aesthetics?

On these questions I believe Jeffrey L. Sammons offers some helpful remarks on the hunger for wholeness in the German tradition. Sammons ascribes this hunger to the loss of paradise which is generally thought to have resulted from the introduction of private property, a view that places this problem squarely in Marxist territory.<sup>14</sup> Sammons thinks the entire hunger complex is a myth, and offers a thoughtful assessment of some of its implications.

The responsible critic must endeavor to make some distinctions here [about lost Golden Ages], which sometimes get blurred in the metaphorical habits of, especially, German thinkers. Whether futurism is a specifically German view, impelled by the misery of political reality, is questionable, but its persistence, not only in the proto-realistic theories of the Young Germans around 1835, but even in the foundations of German realism itself, gives one pause. Müller-Seidel has warned us against an excess of rationalism, and reminds us that "the recovery of paradise after its loss is a literary motif of high rank." Of course it is, but when we are examining the cognitive claims made for literature, a distinction between real history and imaginative myth seems urgent. Wolfgang Binder has remarked that no post-medieval writer has believed literally in the myth of the Golden Age, that it is "not a creed, but a method." I am not as confident about this as I should like to be, and, anyway, some cultural criticism tends to handle myth ambiguously, offering it as metaphor, but nevertheless acting upon it intellectually as though in some sense it were history. When a philosophy of history that contains obvious mythical elements becomes the framework for estimating the truth of literature, then our troubles multiply. (Sammons, p. 59)

Sammons charges Marxism with allowing the myth of a "truncated eschatology"  
<sup>15</sup>  
 to eclipse the present.

The disappearance of the present may be a common feature of the intellectual interpretation of the modern condition, but it appears to me most profound in the German tradition, doubtless owing to the recurrently unsatisfactory nature of the German social and political environment. It is a Romantic inheritance, and that inheritance conditions the tendency to look for redemption in the artistic imagination. (Sammons, p. 61)<sup>16</sup>

I believe this background is essential if we are to understand Adorno's despair with the present which, as Fritz J. Raddatz points out, Adorno often

called a "wound."<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to accept that Adorno's dialectical mind could conceive of just complete falseness, despite his famous reply to Hegel that the whole is false.<sup>18</sup> However, his point of departure is nevertheless the falseness of society; art emerges to show that even in falseness truth can emerge through resistance against falseness. Thus, truth is inextricably tied to and conditioned by falseness. This shows, however, that if falseness is a starting point it is not also the end, for through the dialectic Adorno arrives at the possibility for truth in falseness, for art as a corrective to false society.

Perhaps the problem with Adorno's discussions of falseness is the ease with which they imply reference points of better times lying either in the past or the future that, as we have seen, occasionally find their way into Adorno's texts. The dissatisfaction with the present appears to link Adorno (and other Marxists) in many ways to early German Romanticism that also anguished over the falseness of an earthly existence. Unfortunately, this commonality between Marxism and early German Romanticism (which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI below) seemingly leads Marxists such as Adorno to import many of the Romantic myths, especially the myth of a past Golden Age, that exposes Marxism to the charge of being based on speculation. As Sammons puts it:

My real point here . . . is that Marxist criteria for truth in literature are grounded in a philosophy of history that, while certainly not wholly implausible in the broad outline, is fundamentally speculative and tends to look somewhat quaint and simple-minded as soon as one takes any real historiography in hand. (Sammons, p. 63)

Ironically, the Marxist motive for wanting to criticize society and expose its myths--a dissatisfaction with the present and a desire to change the conditions that make a "livable life" impossible--seem to lead Marxism into

incorporating, at least implicitly, the myths of the Romanticists (and Idealists in general) who were acting on similar motives.

### Artistic Production

We have suggested that Adorno's aesthetics attempts to establish an elaborate means by which art can be determined both on the production and reception side somehow indirectly, above and independent from individual human intention. This is an important part of how art avoids contamination and retains its truth content. As one might imagine, however, a materialist explanation of how art emerges through human labor and yet mediates truth is difficult. Again Adorno is faced with the task of devising an elaborate system to account for the possibility of producing an art that stems from the material world but transcends its conditions and negates its origins in order to mediate truth. Let us begin by looking at a fairly lengthy but important passage by Adorno on the subject.

Art communicates with the outside world through noncommunication, because it seeks, blissfully or unhappily, to seclude itself from the world. This noncommunication points to the fractured nature of art. It would be easy to think that art's autonomous domain has no more in common with the outside world than a few borrowed elements undergoing radical change in the context of art. But there is more to it than that. The historical cliché which states that the developments of artistic methods, usually lumped together under the term "style," correspond to social development is undeniable. . . .

That works of art as windowless monads "present" something which they themselves are not can hardly be grasped other than thus: artworks' own dynamic, their immanent historicity as dialectical tension between nature and domination of nature is not only of the same kind as that of the external; the dialectic of art resembles the social dialectic without imitating it. The productive force of useful labor and that of art are the same. They both have the same teleology. And what might be termed aesthetic relations of production--defined as everything that provides an outlet for the productive forces of art or everything in which these forces become embedded--are sedimentations of social relations of production bearing the imprint of the latter. Thus in all dimensions of its productive process art has a twofold essence, being both an autonomous entity and a social fact in

the Durkheimian sense of the term. (AT, pp. 7-8, translation modified)<sup>19</sup>

This quote, in referring to the identity between the productive force in useful labor and in art, makes clear that Adorno did not substantially modify his position in Aesthetic Theory from the earlier position he took in Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie where he also insisted on such identity. Some critics of Adorno have pointed out that the terms productive force (Produktivkraft) and relation of production (Produktionsverhältnis) come directly from Marx's terms productive forces (Produktivkräfte) and relations of production (Produktionsverhältnisse), but questioned if the latter's terms make sense in Adorno's theory.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, I agree with Karol Sauerland's observation that while it is certainly possible to demonstrate shortcomings in Adorno's application of Marx's terms, such an effort accomplishes little toward understanding the fruitful moments of Adorno's aesthetics.<sup>21</sup> I will thus not attempt to criticize the fine points where Adorno's definitions seem to deviate from Marx's. Instead, I will try to explain how Adorno employs these terms in his discussion of how art can escape the stigma of its human origins.

While Adorno's definition of artistic productive forces varies depending on the context in which it appears, these forces generally refer both to everything necessary to create the artwork (all the requisite technical and artistic know-how, techniques, and equipment) and all the requirements for its reproduction (i.e., interpretation in music, recitation in poetry, production knowledge and equipment in the theater, as well as the multitude of technical equipment used to reproduce music from records, tapes, etc. for broadcasting or for private use). The relations of production for Adorno are the economic and ideological conditions that control artistic creation.<sup>22</sup> Productive forces and the relations of

production make up a dynamic unity in which the two constantly influence each other. On the one hand, as Adorno explains, productive forces can expand the relations of production.

Productive forces themselves in the particular social sphere of music can change, or to a certain extent, even create relations of production. Transformations of public taste through great production--abruptly through Wagner, imperceptibly slowly in entertainment music (where despite being diluted and neutralized the compositional innovations leave behind their traces)--are models for this process. Sometimes musical productive forces explode the relations of production that are sedimented in the public taste as in the case of jazz which expelled all the non-syncopated dance music from the vogue and degraded it to a memory piece. (Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie, p. 423, my translation)<sup>23</sup>

Productive forces, however, can also have a restrictive effect, as Adorno explains in the next paragraph.

Conversely, productive forces have the power to fetter productive forces; in recent times this is the rule. The music market has refused the advanced, which has held up musical progress. There is no doubt that numerous composers--and by no means just since the middle of the nineteenth century--had to suppress what they themselves desired because they were compelled to adapt to the market. That which is almost intolerably referred to by the expression alienation from advanced production and listenership should be broken down into its social proportions: as an unfolding of the productive forces that refuse to be bridled by the relations of production and severely opposes them. (Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie, p. 423, my translation)<sup>24</sup>

These definitions shed light on how Adorno intends to allow art to remain autonomous while allowing for input from the social and economic setting. The relations of production are quite comprehensive. They include, for example, public taste, which to a large degree dictates the market for art. They also include the particular types, genres, and themes, indeed the entire tradition in which art must survive. In this way, the relations of production could be considered social, economic, and artistic problems confronting the artist.

The productive forces can be viewed as the artist's arsenal of possible solutions to these problems. These possibilities too are comprehensive, including techniques, knowledge, and equipment to name a few.

Actual artistic production therefore is a kind of problem solving exercise in which the artist engages, a confrontation between the artist and artistic material, another important element in Adorno's system, for the material contains within itself the stored problems and tried solutions of the past (because of this, the mediation between art and society takes place below the surface of the activities of the individual artist). To simplify somewhat, the relationship of the force of production with the relations of production is the struggle of artists (and everything at their disposal) with the material (and indirectly with the tradition and society itself).<sup>25</sup>

#### Artistic Material

The artistic material--the historical level of advancement in artistic technique including content as well as the formal means at hand to deal with this content--stores the experience of socially determined history. Thus, an artist's attempt to come to terms with material is simultaneously an attempt to deal with social problems. With his concept of material, Adorno sets out to replace the traditional opposition between form and content with the opposition between material and artistic means of proceeding (künstlerischer Verfahrensweise).

Peter Bürger points out why this opposition at first may be difficult to understand: in design, Adorno's opposition seems to juxtapose the objective (the given material) with the subjective (the artistic means of proceeding). Yet the material itself is the result of the subjective labor of previous artists: "the

material itself is always already a product of means of proceeding (Verfahrungsweise), permeated (durchwachsen) by subjective moments" (Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie, p. 421, my translation).<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the material, despite its subjective component, presents itself to the contemporary artist as a quasi-object consisting of artistic and technical problems. Thus, the concept of material allows society to present itself to art while preserving art's autonomous status. In addition, it enables the individual artwork to influence the mediation between future art and society.

One may perhaps ask whether Adorno's concept of material can account for how the historical component, formed by dominating and forceful figures, can adequately represent the mass movements of history, particularly when we consider that influential artists often win their status by, to use Jauss's terms, "breaking the norms" of a particular society's "horizon of expectations." Moreover, if the material is that which is presented to the artist from previous influential artists, it may be difficult to see how this exclusive group can represent the totality of history. Peter Bürger, for example, suspects that Adorno's concept of material may simply return us to the history of ideas approach and influence studies, albeit with Marxist terminology. On this point, Jameson provides perhaps the best answer when he claims that the concept of a global totality is not as methodologically useful as "limited sequences which are modified by the addition of a new term, itself perceived against the continuum of which it is a part" (Marxism and Form, p. 314). Jameson makes clear that our understanding of literary history and its developments is to a large degree an understanding of how major writers represent changes in the literary landscape. About "limited sequences" he writes:

Such limited sequences furnished the context or framework for literary understanding at least as long ago as the Greek tragedians: in modern times we have only to think of Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne in the English novel; Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola in the French; Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé in the development of modern poetry, to realize the degree to which our understanding of any one of these authors is a function of a differential perception in which his position in the sequence determines the way in which his specificity is measured. That Flaubert is *sui generis* is to say nothing but that he is no longer Balzac, that he is not yet Zola, and this in a host of determinate ways, is to articulate the structures inherent in and constitutive of the novel of Flaubert. . . . Such sequences, and such comparisons, largely transcend traditional questions of the personal influence of one writer upon another. We are, I think, for the most part agreed to see the individual writer as the locus or working out of a certain set of techniques, as the development and exhaustion of a certain limited set of possibilities inherent in the available raw material itself. (Marxism and Form, pp. 314-15)

The artistic material can thus be seen to some degree as the works of previous artists, which represent their attempts to solve formal and technical problems. Through knowledge of this tradition, succeeding artists know what solutions have been attempted in the past, what possibilities have been exhausted. The task of each new artist in Adorno's program is thus to employ the most advanced means possible (which are to some extent influenced by the relations of production) toward solving the problems the material comprises.

At this point it bears mentioning that Adorno's theory of material and his demand for progressive solutions derive from a particular example in musical history, specifically Schönberg's introduction of the twelve tone technique as the answer to a host of problems that Wagner had left behind.<sup>27</sup> And indeed most of the secondary literature on Adorno's aesthetic theory also concerns musical, not literary art.<sup>28</sup> These facts will affect our efforts in Chapter VI to discover Adorno's relevance for literary phenomena, specifically whether a theory largely adopted from musical examples to explain, among other things, mediation in music of a specific transitional period can also be applied to elucidate literary

aesthetic phenomena. But it also has implications for the present issue of material; it may also allow us to elaborate briefly on two points we touched on earlier: Adorno's elitism and pessimism.

In his discussion of material, both Adorno's pessimism and his classical background (which some would call elitist) manifest themselves. Elitist, for example, seems to be his opinion that one really only understands a work when one has the erudition to recognize the formal/technical solutions the artist has developed to deal with the problems facing him. His pessimism too seems grounded in an elitist opinion about art development. He fears, for example, that the outer limits of technical solutions have been reached, as if the twelve tone system were music's last hurrah (a position similar to Hegel's, who also predicted the end of art).

Possibilities for new sounds within the realm of the twelve halftones of the tempered mood have virtually exhausted themselves. No tone today could easily claim never to have been heard before. If an insatiable composer went on a search for such a tone, he would fall into that state of powerlessness that always sets in as soon as the material no longer expands itself out of compulsion, but rather is checked off, like inventory in a warehouse, by someone in search of charms of novelty. The noncommitment of musical radicalism today, the moderation of the bold is the direct result of the fact that the absolute limit of the historical tonal system of Western music appears to be reached; that every conceivable tonal single event has already done its work as previously planned, while neither a strong impulse of the tonal system to burst itself has roused. Nor has the mere ability to hear spontaneously outside of this system manifested itself.<sup>29</sup> (Dissonanzen, pp. 154-55, my translation)

The situation, however, may not be completely hopeless: Adorno for example wonders whether it may be time for composers to concentrate their efforts in another direction, "not in the direction of mere organization of the material, but in the direction of composing true, coherent music also with the always disqualified material" (Dissonanzen, p. 155, my translation).<sup>30</sup> But this

hope seems modest at best. Yet seemingly revolutionary developments in music--the electronic sound generators, synthesizers, and other new tools--Adorno rejects, seemingly because for him only the classical instruments were capable of producing what he would call music (electronic music was the product of a mathematically based, and therefore reified type of production). One could argue, however, that the twelve tone system also had similarities to mathematics.

It seems as if Adorno is trapped by his background and attitudes, which only allow him to entertain a limited set of alternatives. For him, music is classical Western music that was radically changed by Schönberg's oppositional and negating compositions, whose system eventually reached an impasse. Adorno's hailing of the new and the revolutionary--necessary as a response to the reified, administered world--accompanied by the restrictions from which the new may emerge, conditions this impasse. Adorno, it seems, could have considered other alternatives that perhaps take reification as a basic condition for creation. We can point to Jameson's explanation of the emergence of landscape art as an example: ". . . fragmentation, reification, but also production, of new semi-autonomous objects and activities, is clearly the objective precondition for the emergence of genres such as landscape, in which the viewing of an otherwise (or at least a traditionally) meaningless object--nature without people--comes to seem a self-justifying activity" (Political Unconscious, p. 229). Another possibility would be to oppose banal reification through magnification by producing an art that "oultreifies" the reified world. In other words, the determinate negation may not be the only way to preserve art's autonomy. Again, as we have said before, opposition and noncommunication may not be enough to define a survivable art. The limitations Adorno saw may have been the limitations of his theory, not of art.

### Mediation between Art and Society

Up to this point, we have only intimated how mediation takes place according to Adorno's theory.<sup>31</sup> We have now set up enough background so that we can attempt to tackle an important specific case of mediation: between art and society.

In Adorno's theory, mediation between society and art does not take place in some third realm lying between them. ". . . mediation [Vermittlung] takes place not externally, in a third medium between thing [Sache] and society, but rather inside of the thing" (Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie, p. 409, my translation).<sup>32</sup> Adorno, following the Hegelian-Marxian tradition, postulates that the mediation between art and society can be found in the artwork itself and that such mediation is best revealed through immanent criticism of the work of art. If immanent criticism is to be successful in bringing to the surface social and class struggles, it must concentrate on the structure of the work, for the structure encompasses and mediates the stored up tensions of society; in contrast to the structure of artworks, the overt political positions expressed in artworks are only epiphenomena that mostly place an extra burden onto the task of discovering the work's truth content (we will discuss immanent criticism in more detail in Chapter VI).

Social conflicts and class relations leave an imprint on the structure of works of art. By contrast, the political positions art works explicitly take are epiphenomenal. Usually they work to the disadvantage of elaboration, ultimately undermining even the social truth content. In art little is achieved by political convictions alone. (AT, pp. 329-30, translation modified)<sup>33</sup>

This statement makes Adorno's opposition to politically committed art apparent.<sup>34</sup> Adorno's insistence that art can only indirectly and unconsciously oppose society

is closely linked to his position that art is an unconscious writing of history. "Unbeknown to themselves, [artworks] represent the historiography [Geschichtsschreibung] of their times, which is why they are related to knowledge" (AT, p. 261).<sup>35</sup> That artistic works yield an account of history has nothing to do with an artist's purpose to produce such an account. Rather, this product comes about automatically from the artist's confrontation with the artistic material.<sup>36</sup>

What this suggests is that the actual mediation between society and art takes place clandestinely, veiled by the visible struggle of the artist with material. Thus the transcoding of the social into the artistic is beyond the conscious control of the artist (and must remain beyond his control if art is to mediate truth). This explains how art can mediate truth despite its human origins. The conscious activities of the artist are more comparable to those of a technician than a creative genius. And this condition must remain art's hope.

Another piece of information surrounding Adorno's work on mediation has to do with one of his major targets: the empirical sociology of music that was practiced and promoted by the sociologist Alphons Silbermann. Adorno's opposition to Silbermann also brought out some of his clearest statements about the reception side of mediation, an area to which Adorno for several reasons devoted less attention than to production. Nevertheless, reception is an important component of any theory of mediation. We thus shift our attention in that direction.

### Toward Reception

In Adorno's debate with the empirical sociologist Alphons Silbermann, the battle lines were fairly clearly drawn: Silbermann defined the object of study based on a positivistic/empirical model, while Adorno countered with a

dialectical/materialist position. For Silbermann, the work of art is identified through its effect, with effect defined as that which can be registered by a process of quantitative analysis. For Adorno, effect (Wirkung) is to an overwhelming degree determined by manipulation of the recipient through the numerous mechanisms of the culture industry. ". . . the effects [Wirkungen] [of artworks] depend on countless mechanisms of dissemination, social control and authority, and finally on the social structure, within which their effect-connections (Wirkungszusammenhänge) are established" ("Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie," p. 367, my translation).<sup>37</sup> To view the work of art as merely a stimulus, as Silbermann presumably does, according to Adorno brackets out of the model the content of the artwork; furthermore, in making the effect on a recipient the supreme object of study and transforming effect into a quantifiable fact, Silbermann legitimizes the very response that the manipulative culture industry with great effort conditions or even dictates. The sociology of art must concern itself with much more.

The sociology of art encompasses, by definition, all aspects in the relationship between art and society. It is impossible to restrict it to the social effect (Wirkung) of artworks. For this effect itself is only one moment in the totality of that relationship. To isolate and proclaim it as the only worthy object of study for a sociology of art would amount to substituting a methodological preference for an objective interest that permits no prejudicial definition. . . . ("Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie," p. 367, my translation)<sup>38</sup>

For Adorno, important questions about art's social role and its effects cannot be determined based on the highly subjective responses of the public. Instead, the ideal methodology should be a reciprocal model combining objective analyses of artworks' response mechanisms with a meaningful compilation of subjective findings in response studies: the objective and the subjective must explain each other dialectically. Adorno's thoughts on reception reveal two

major assumptions that Bürger has identified: that artworks, as social products, have something to say about the society from which they emerged and that there are deficient as well as authentic receptions of artworks.

Since the study of reception has become increasingly stressed in the field of literary studies, the area of reception warrants closer attention in our search to see if Adorno's aesthetic theory retains its relevance and if that theory, largely derived to explain developments in music, can also shed some light on questions of negativity and mediation in literature.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps the main reason some commentators on Adorno have wondered why he remained within the conceptual system of Western philosophy. Terry Eagleton, for example, writes: "For discourse to refer, even protestingly, is for it to become instantly complicit with what it criticizes; in a familiar linguistic and psychoanalytic paradox, negation negates itself because it cannot help but posit the object it desires to destroy. Any enunciation is fatally compromised by the very fact of being such; and it follows that what one is left with is the purest imprint of the gesture of negation itself, the prototype of which, for Adorno, is modernist and post-modernist art," rev. of Aesthetics and Politics, New Left Review, No. 107 (1978), 30-31. See too my discussion of Jean-François Lyotard's criticisms of Adorno's program in "Representation," Chapter VII below.

<sup>2</sup> "... etwas in der Realität jenseits des Schleiers, den das Zusammenspiel von Institutionen und falschem Bedürfnis webt, [verlangt] objektiv nach Kunst; nach einer, die für das spricht, was den Schleier zudeckt. Während diskursive Erkenntnis an die Realität heranreicht, auch an ihre Irrationalitäten, die ihrerseits ihrem Bewegungsgesetz entspringen, ist etwas an ihr spröde gegen rationale Erkenntnis. Dieser ist das Leiden fremd, sie kann es subsumierend bestimmen, Mittel zur Linderung beistellen; kaum durch seine Erfahrung ausdrücken: eben das hieße ihr irrational. Leiden, auf den Begriff gebracht, bleibt stumm und konsequenzlos. . ." (AT, p. 35).

<sup>3</sup> "Kunst wird davon bewegt, daß ihr Zauber, Rudiment der magischen Phase, als unmittelbare sinnliche Gegenwart von der Entzauberung der Welt widerlegt ist, während jenes Moment nicht ausradiert werden kann" (AT, pp. 92-3).

<sup>4</sup> "In ihren sämtlichen Gattungen ist Kunst von intellektiven Momenten durchsetzt. Genügen mag, daß große musikalische Formen ohne diese, ohne Vor- und Nach hören, Erwartung und Erinnerung, ohne Synthesis des Getrennten nicht sich konstituieren würden. Während derlei Funktionen in gewissem Maß der sinnlichen Unmittelbarkeit zuzurechnen sind, also gegenwärtige Teilkomplexe die Gestaltqualitäten des Vergangenen und Kommenden mit sich führen, erreichen doch die Kunstwerke Schwellenwerte, wo jene Unmittelbarkeit endet, wo sie 'gedacht' werden müssen, nicht in einer ihnen äußerlichen Reflexion, sondern aus sich heraus: zu ihrer eigenen sinnlichen Komplexion gehört die intellektive Vermittlung und bedingt ihre Wahrnehmung" (AT, pp. 138-9).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Jay refers to Peter Gay, Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider (New York: Harper, 1968), Chapter IV, in his article "The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno," Telos, 32 (1977), p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> David H. Miles, "Portrait of the Marxist as a Young Hegelian: Lukács' Theory of the Novel, PMLA, 94 (1979), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> "... [Kunstwerke] . . . retten, neutralisiert, was einmal die Menschen buchstäblich und ungeschieden am Dasein erfuhren, und was aus diesem der Geist vertrieb" (AT, p. 16).

<sup>8</sup> "Auf der Bahn ihrer Rationalität und durch diese hindurch wird die Menschheit in Kunst dessen inne, was Rationalität vergißt. . ." (AT, p. 105).

<sup>9</sup> "des herrschaftslosen Zustands eingedenkt, der wahrscheinlich nie gewesen ist" (AT, p. 104).

<sup>10</sup> As to Miles' other claim about Adorno's "underlying pessimism about modernism," it seems to me that here too he misrepresents Adorno's position, perhaps only to keep intact his thesis about the pervasive influence of German Idealism on all the thinkers he takes up. Yes, Adorno was pessimistic about modernism, but he was pessimistic about everything; the pessimism was certainly not "underlying." In fact, the only art form in which he saw hope for somewhat less pessimism was modernism, for reasons which should be clear at the end of the present study. Only artists like Kafka and Beckett, whose enigmatic art defies categorization and understanding, can resist the culture industry and shock reified minds into recognition. Lukács was pessimistic about modernism and offered social realism as an example of what could be better. Adorno was pessimistic about modernism, but thought it was the only alternative available, probably because no past art was ever completely successful in realizing reconciliation. This view hardly puts Adorno in Lukács' "camp." On this point, Jay is correct in mentioning Adorno's and Brecht's interest in (and Lukács' abhorrence of) modernism.

<sup>11</sup> "Ein großer Teil der denkenden Anstrengung Theodor W. Adornos gilt dem Versuch zu sagen, wie denn das Verhältnis des Menschen zur Natur gedacht werden muß, von dem er sich in der Geschichte emanzipiert hat."

<sup>12</sup> "Wenn das Ganze falsch ist, dann müßte es auch eine Veränderung des total Falschen wenigstens der Möglichkeit nach geben oder zumindest denkbar sein. Doch Adorno sagt, daß es eine solche Möglichkeit nicht gibt."

<sup>13</sup> Another sentence, from AT, that suggests a belief in attaining harmony in the future is cited in the previous chapter, p. 50. A further piece of evidence suggests Adorno's interest in a future normative totality was more than just theoretical. In her article "Erwiderung auf Tombergs Kritik an Adorno," Das Argument, Vol 6 (1964), pp. 156-58, Michaela Alth responds to Friedrich Tomberg's charge that the world for which Adorno strives is a sort of mental utopia that can only be conceived through intellectual effort of idealist German

philosophy, i.e., cannot be realized in practice ("Utopie und Negation: Zum ontologischen Hintergrund der Kunstretheorie Theodor W. Adornos," Das Argument, Vol. 5 [1963], 36-48). Alth sees no insurmountable reason why Adorno's vision could not be realized, since in a society that produces an overabundance of goods, happiness and good fortune do not have to be only open to the privileged. And with the growth of automation, the connection between pay and work becomes ever more questionable; the lifting of national borders is also not impossible (p. 157). Sauerland reports that Adorno allegedly expressed his acceptance of Alth's position, (Sauerland, p. 62).

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey L. Sammons, Literary Sociology and Practical Criticism: An Inquiry, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 57-63.

<sup>15</sup> Sammons' account of this myth: "Once upon a time, the bourgeoisie was the progressive class. In its rebellion against feudalism, absolutism, and the imprisonment of mind and conscience by the Church, the bourgeois class applied the revolutionary claim of reason to existing conditions and generated in its imagination a utopian vision of liberty, equality, and fraternity, thus developing universal and humanistic categories of an emancipated mankind. This was the Golden Age of the bourgeoisie. It encompasses what Adorno liked to call the 'great philosophy,' that is, German philosophy from Leibniz and Kant to Hegel (whose ultimate harvesting was, of course, accomplished by Marx), and what with increasing frequency is now referred to as the Great French Revolution. This was the age in Germany that abandoned the relational thinking of the Enlightenment and its pragmatic analysis of present reality in favor of a search for a unified substance of spirit and matter that could, of course, nowhere be located in the present and thus linked Homeric antiquity with an essentially aesthetic vision of organic utopia.

"There occurred, however, the Fall. Its outward manifestations in Germany are Romanticism, especially its latter phase, and eventually the failure of the revolution of 1848; in France the halting of the Revolution, marked by the defeat of Robespierre. The Fall is caused by the pressure of the burgeoning proletariat, perceived as the 'mob.' The bourgeoisie resists the extension of liberty and emancipation to this class and, with that refusal, reason ceases to be its ally and its imagination is impoverished. Its consciousness becomes a false consciousness, reifying its universalistic categories, for, though they continue to be enunciated, they apply to the bourgeoisie alone. Thus matters have stood from that day to this, though continually worsening. The claims of the bourgeoisie to be the model of modern humanity become increasingly grotesque through capitalism, colonial imperialism, Fascism, anti-Communism, economic imperialism, and so forth. Society is riven, culture decays, and the public community, through which reason articulates itself and which is the basis of eighteenth-century constitutionalism, gradually disappears; along with it disappears a genuinely public community of the arts. Under the circumstances of 'late capitalism' a fulfilled individual existence is no longer possible, while the disintegrating and mendacious society continues to judge itself incongruously by a Goethean ideal of the meaningfully integrated, self-realizing individual" (Sammons, p. 60).

<sup>16</sup> Sammons illustrates this point effectively with an aphorism from around 1798 by Novalis: "Nothing is more poetic than memory and presentiment or idea of the future. Our ideas of prehistory attract us to dying, to evanescence. Our ideas of the future drive us to invigoration, to abbreviation, to assimilating activity. Therefore all memory is melancholy, all presentiment joyful. . . . But there is a mental present that identifies both through dissolution, and this mixture is the element, the atmosphere, of the poet" (quoted in Sammons, p. 61).

<sup>17</sup> Fritz J. Raddatz, "Der hölzerne Eisenring; Die moderne Literatur zwischen zweierlei Ästhetik: Lukács und Adorno," Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken, 31 (1977), p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Those critics who take Adorno to task for such blanket statements may be reading Adorno, who often played with language and utilized hyperbole, too literally. Otwin Massing, for example, argues in his book [Adorno und die Folgen: Über das "hermetische Prinzip" der Kritischen Theorie] (Neuwied: Leuchterhand, 1970), p. 44] that Adorno uses references to Auschwitz as a pretext to avoid having to document the hopeless condition of the world. Auschwitz, an emotionally loaded word, becomes synonymous with neo-barbarianism and radical brutality. Such global judgments, however, Massing protests, are no substitute for analysis and evidence. It seems to me, however, that Adorno can use Auschwitz as an example of "neo-barbarianism and radical brutality" even though more analysis may be needed.

<sup>19</sup> "Die Kommunikation der Kunstwerke mit dem Auswendigen jedoch, mit der Welt, vor der sie selig oder unselig sich verschließen, geschieht durch Nicht-Kommunikation; darin eben erweisen sie sich als gebrochen. Leicht ließe sich denken, daß ihr autonomes Reich mit der auswendigen Welt nicht mehr gemein hat als entlehnte Elemente, die in einen gänzlich veränderten Zusammenhang treten. Trotzdem ist die geistesgeschichtliche Trivialität unbestreitbar, daß die Entwicklung der künstlerischen Verfahrensweisen, wie sie meist unter dem Begriff des Stils zusammengefaßt wird, der gesellschaftlichen korrespondiert. . . . Daß die Kunstwerke als fensterlose Monaden das 'vorstellen', was sie nicht selbst sind, ist kaum anders zu begreifen als dadurch, daß ihre eigene Dynamik, ihre immanente Historizität als Dialektik von Natur und Naturbeherrschung nicht nur desselben Wesens ist wie die auswendige, sondern in sich jener ähnelt, ohne sie zu imitieren. Die ästhetische Produktivkraft ist die gleiche wie die der nützlichen Arbeit und hat in sich dieselbe Teleologie; und was ästhetisches Produktionsverhältnis heißen darf, alles worin die Produktivkraft sich eingebettet findet und woran sie sich betätigt, sind Sedimente oder Abdrücke der gesellschaftlichen. Der Doppelcharakter der Kunst als autonom und als fait social teilt ohne Unterlaß der Zone ihrer Autonomie sich mit" (ÄT, pp. 15-16).

<sup>20</sup> Peter Bürger, "Das Vermittlungsproblem in der Kunstsoziologie Adornos" in: Vermittlung--Rezeption--Funktion: Ästhetische Theorie und Methodologie der Literaturwissenschaft (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 79-92. This essay also appears in: Burkhardt Lindner and W. Martin Lüdke, ed., Materialien zur

ästhetischen Theorie Theodor W. Adornos. Konstruktion der Moderne, pp. 169-84. See also Jürgen Fredel, "Kunst als Produktivkraft: Kritik eines Fetischs am Beispiel der ästhetischen Theorie Th. W. Adornos," in Michael Müller, et al., Autonomie der Kunst: Zur Genese und Kritik einer bürgerlichen Kategorie (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 231-253.

<sup>21</sup> Sauerland, pp. 119-20.

<sup>22</sup> This is a paraphrase of good general definitions Adorno gives in Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie: Zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen, p. 422.

<sup>23</sup> "Produktivkräfte können selbst in der gesellschaftlich partikularen Sphäre der Musik Produktionsverhältnisse verändern, in gewissem Grad sogar schaffen. Wandlungen des Publikumsgeschmacks durch große Produktionen, abrupt etwa durch Wagner, unmerklich langsam in der Unterhaltungsmusik, in der trotz allem, verwässert und neutralisiert, die kompositorischen Neuerungen ihre Spuren hinterlassen, sind dafür das Modell. . . . Zuweilen sprengen musikalische Produktivkräfte die im Geschmack sedimentierten Produktionsverhältnisse: so im Jazz, der die gesamte nicht synkopierte Tanzmusik aus der Mode verjagt und zum Erinnerungsstück degradiert hat." The similarity here to Jauss's notion of "valuable art expanding the public's 'horizon of expectation'" through its "norm-breaking potential" appears quite obvious. For a discussion of the Adorno-Jauss relationship and debate, see the following chapter on reception.

<sup>24</sup> "Umgekehrt vermögen Produktionsverhältnisse Produktivkräfte zu fesseln; in der neueren Zeit ist das die Regel. Der musikalische Markt hat das Fortgeschrittene refusiert und dadurch den musikalischen Fortschritt aufgehalten; kein Zweifel, daß zahlreiche Komponisten, keineswegs erst seit der Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, durch den Zwang zur Anpassung das, wonach es sie eigentlich gelüftet, in sich selbst unterdrücken mußten. Was, mit einem nachgerade schwer erträglichen Ausdruck, Entfremdung von avancierter Produktion und Hörschaft genannt wird, wäre auf seine gesellschaftlichen Proportionen zu bringen: als Entfaltung der Produktivkräfte, die sich der Gängelung durch die Produktionsverhältnisse weigert und schließlich diesen schroff sich entgegensezten."

<sup>25</sup> For a somewhat helpful discussion of the concept of material in the musical theories of Adorno and Hanns Eisler, see Günter Mayer, "Zur Dialektik des musikalischen Materials," Alternative 12 (1969), 239-258. Also on the topic of material in Adorno, see Wolfgang Burde, "Versuch über einen Satz Theodor W. Adornos," in Humanität und Erziehung: Festgabe für Wilhelm Richter zum 70. Geburtstag (Berlin: Pädagogische Hochschule, 1971), pp. 83-93.

<sup>26</sup> "das Material ist selber stets schon ein von den Verfahrungsweisen Gezeitigtes, durchwachsen von subjektiven Momenten."

<sup>27</sup> Both Sauerland and Bürger mention this point, with Bürger seeing it as a limitation to Adorno's usefulness as a general theory of aesthetics.

<sup>28</sup> See Ernst Grohotolsky, Ästhetik der Negation--Tendenzen des deutschen Gegenwartsdramas: Versuch über die Aktualität der "Ästhetischen Theorie" Theodor W. Adornos (Königstein/Ts.: Forum Academicum, 1984), p. vii.

<sup>29</sup> ". . . Möglichkeiten neuer Klänge innerhalb des Bereichs der zwölf Halbtöne der temperierten Stimmung [haben sich] virtuell erschöpft. . . . Kein Klang heute könnte so leicht mehr den Anspruch des nie Gehörten anmelden. Ginge ein unersättlicher Komponist auf die Suche danach, so verfiele er jener Ohnmacht, die immer sich einstellt, sobald das Material nicht mehr aus Zwang sich erweitert, sondern neuen Reizmitteln zuliebe gleich einem Lager durchmustert wird. Die Unverbindlichkeit des musikalischen Radikalismus heute, die Billigkeit des Kühnen ist die unmittelbare Folge dessen, daß die absolute Grenze des geschichtlichen Tonraums der abendländischen Musik erreicht scheint, daß jedes erdenkliche klangliche Einzelereignis wie bereits vorgesehen, eingeplant wirkt, während der Tonraum selber zu sprengen bis heute weder ein starker Impuls sich regt noch auch bloß die Fähigkeit sich zeigt, außerhalb jenes Raumes spontan zu hören" (Dissonanzen: Musik in der verwalteten Welt, Vol. XIV of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 154-55.

<sup>30</sup> "nicht auf die bloße Organisation des Materials hin, sondern auf das Komponieren wahrhaft kohärenter Musik mit dem wie immer auch entqualifizierten Material."

<sup>31</sup> The following discussion of mediation closely follows Adorno's arguments in Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie (particularly the section on mediation entitled "Vermittlung" and the helpful "Nachwort: Musiksoziologie" that appears at the end of the "Vorlesungen," pp. 422-433).

<sup>32</sup> ". . . Vermittlung [findet] nicht äußerlich, in einem dritten Medium zwischen Sache und Gesellschaft [statt], sondern innerhalb der Sache."

<sup>33</sup> "Gesellschaftliche Kämpfe, Klassenverhältnisse drücken in der Struktur von Kunstwerken sich ab; die politischen Positionen, die Kunstwerke von sich aus beziehen, sind demgegenüber Epiphänomene, meist zu Lasten der Durchbildung der Kunstwerke und damit am Ende auch ihres gesellschaftlichen Wahrheitsgehalts. Mit Gesinnung ist wenig getan" (AT, p. 344).

<sup>34</sup> On this subject, see Ronald Taylor, ed. Aesthetics and Politics: Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno. See also Chapter II above.

35 "[Kunstwerke] sind die ihrer selbst unbewußte Geschichtsschreibung ihrer Epoche; das nicht zuletzt vermittelt sie zur Erkenntnis" (AT, p. 272).

36 On this aspect of musical production, see Lucia Sziborsky, Adorno's Musikphilosophie: Genese, Konstitution, Pädagogische Perspektiven (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1979), pp. 82-86.

37 ". . . die Wirkungen [der Kunstwerke] [hängen] von zahllosen Mechanismen der Verbreitung, der sozialen Kontrolle und Autorität, schließlich der gesellschaftlichen Struktur ab, innerhalb deren Wirkungszusammenhänge sich konstatieren lassen" "Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie," in Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I: Prismen, Ohne Leitbild, Vol. X, part one of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1977).

38 "Kunstsoziologie umfaßt, dem Wortsinn nach, alle Aspekte im Verhältnis von Kunst und Gesellschaft. Unmöglich, sie auf irgendeinen, etwa auf die gesellschaftliche Wirkung von Kunstwerken, einzuschränken. Denn diese Wirkung ist selbst nur ein Moment in der Totalität jenes Verhältnisses. Sie herauszulösen und für den einzige würdigen Gegenstand von Kunstsoziologie zu erklären, hieße deren sachliches Interesse, das jeder vorgreifenden Definition sich entzieht, durch methodologische Präferenz zu ersetzen. . . ."

CHAPTER V  
ADORNO AND RECEPTION

Relying only on the brief introduction to the Adorno-Silbermann debate in the previous chapter, one could assume that in his aesthetic considerations Adorno assigned little importance to questions of reception. To assume this, however, would be inaccurate.<sup>1</sup> While it is true that Adorno harbored reservations about the kind of empirical positivism Silbermann was promoting, Adorno did state at times that studies of reception had their appropriate place. In his "Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie," for example, in which Adorno criticized the methods of Silbermann, he also wrote: "I feel absolutely misunderstood when my publications on the sociology of music since my return from emigration are considered as the opposite of empirical social research" ("Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie," p. 368, my translation).<sup>2</sup> And in an essay completed in the 60s recounting his experiences conducting research in the United States during his emigration from Germany, which we will examine in some detail below, Adorno wrote:

I would like to clarify briefly and somewhat crudely my own position in the controversy between empirical and theoretical sociology that often, above all here in Germany, has been entirely falsely represented: it seems to me that empirical examinations, also in the area of cultural phenomena, are not only legitimate but necessary. One may not, however, hypostatize them and consider such studies as universal keys. Above all they themselves must terminate in theoretical insight [Erkenntnis]. Theory is no mere vehicle that becomes superfluous as soon as one has data available.<sup>3</sup>

It is thus patently untrue to state that Adorno did not consider or take seriously questions of empirical reception studies. While he was indeed skeptical about most of the methods utilized in empirical research, he certainly did not rule out such studies in principle. And yet Adorno's willingness to consider reception is often either outright denied or only apologetically conceded by critics who must suspect that such a position is inconsistent with most of Adorno's other tenets about art and society. The concern on the part of critics arguing that Adorno's aesthetic theory is based on his staunch and unwavering espousal of negativity is probably justified, since this straightforward explanation is threatened by the embarrassing matter of reception. This is because Adorno's thoughts on reception seem inextricably tied to not one, but at least two competing models of negativity that were briefly presented in Chapter III. The effect of these two models on reception is this: While the one model--the utopian model that sees in art the possibility for man to experience in the appreciation of art moments of reconciliation and freedom from domination--steers attention toward questions of actual reception, the other model--which sees art's noncommunicative and incomprehensible stance as the only way of reaching reified minds--reveals a basic distrust of recipients that extends to the data reception studies collect. In short, Adorno needs a subject to experience the reconciliation he describes, but this subject is precluded by the ubiquitous blindness prevailing in society.

The juxtaposition of these two positions makes apparent the problems involved in attempting to outline the role of reception in Adorno's aesthetic theory. On the one side, we have the Adorno we saw in the last chapter, who for good reasons opposed the positivistic sociology of art associated with Alphons Silbermann. On the other side, we have the Adorno who looks to art's

nonconceptuality and sensuality as a justification for assigning to aesthetic experience uniquely valuable characteristics. Such a hypothesis, however, seems to demand examination of the recipient pole, which leads to a dilemma of sorts for Adorno.

For a discussion of mediation in Adorno's aesthetic theory, it is necessary to identify the theoretical origin of these two divergent positions, which seems to be closely linked to the two permutations of negativity that we have discussed. Adorno's reluctance to take up questions of reception is also important, for in this resistance we can see that the utopian inspired model of negativity forced Adorno into the position of having to consider reception. The place of reception in Adorno's aesthetics is also crucial to the political agenda of a Marxist-inspired theory of aesthetics, as we will see in Hans Robert Jauss's criticisms of Adorno.

To outline some of the major reception issues and implications, I will present Adorno's arguments both for and against reception studies and attempt to tie these positions to aspects of Adorno's aesthetics we have already considered. I will also examine whether the work that has resulted from increased interest in reception in recent years offers solutions to some of the methodological problems Adorno confronted. In this discussion I will also present the position of Hans Robert Jauss, Adorno's harshest critic from the reception area of study. Let us begin, however, by examining Adorno's view of empirical sociological research as he knew it from his experiences in the United States.

#### Adorno's Case for Reception Studies

In the fall of 1937 Adorno received in London a telegram from his friend Max Horkheimer, who before the Hitler reign had been the director of the

Institute for Social Research at the Universität Frankfurt, inviting him to move to the United States to take part in a radio research project.<sup>4</sup> Without actually knowing what the project was to accomplish, Adorno agreed to come, and so began his work with the Princeton Radio Research Project directed by Paul F. Lazarsfeld. Adorno was named to direct the music study of the project on a half-time basis; the other half of his time he spent working with the Institute for Social Research in New York.

Soon Adorno realized that the Radio Research Project was utilizing to a large extent empirical social psychological techniques in an attempt to quantify listener profiles and reactions for quite practical purposes; Adorno relates that his initial introduction to the project consisted of moving from room to room and engaging colleagues in conversations in which phrases such as "Likes and Dislikes Study" and "Success or Failure of a Programme" often recurred, phrases Adorno could not make much of at first. Eventually, however, it became clear to him that his assignment would leave little room for critical social research; this was clear to him from the project's charter that stemmed from the Rockefeller Foundation and emphatically stipulated that the studies be carried out within the scope of the established commercial radio system prevailing in the United States, which meant that the radio system itself, its social and economic presuppositions, and its implications for cultural and sociological development were out of bounds for criticism.

This little biographical aside, while somewhat out of character for the present study, seems necessary background information for a reassessment of Adorno's position on empirical research, for despite parameters that must have seemed shockingly restrictive and reactionary, Adorno nevertheless documents his enthusiastic willingness to experience and conduct research on the famous "other

side of the fence," as he put it: to study the reactions of listeners ("Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," p. 707).<sup>5</sup> His willingness to dive into empirical research, however, was tempered by the proviso that even in empirical studies, especially in cultural operations, that which is often viewed by perceptual psychology as merely a stimulus is in fact qualitatively determined. He thus resisted ascertaining and measuring responses without placing them in a relation with the stimulus and its objectivity. In other words, Adorno believed it was important to keep within the parameters of empirical study the awareness that the stimulus is far from an unmediated objectivity, but rather a product designed by the culture industry for the consumption of, in this case, radio listeners.

What was axiomatic according to the rules of orthodox social research--that to proceed from the reactions of the trial subjects was to proceed from a primary and final genuine source of sociological insight [Erkenntnis]--seemed to me hardly a primary point of departure but rather one that was absolutely mediated and derived. Or, to put it more cautiously: it would have been the task of research to investigate to what extent such types of subjective reactions were really as spontaneous and immediate as the subjects thought, or to what extent not only the mechanisms of dissemination and the power of suggestion of the apparatus, but also the objective implications of the media and the materials--and finally widely overlapping social structures up to the entire society [Gesamtgesellschaft]--are behind that which confronts the listener. That I, however, took objective implications of art instead of statistically measurable listener reactions as my point of departure was alone enough to collide with the positivistic thinking habits that almost indisputably prevailed in American science. ("Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," p. 708, my translation)<sup>6</sup>

Another problem that plagued Adorno in his attempts to adjust to American methods of research concerned the question of how one might articulate what music arouses subjectively in the listener. Techniques that were being employed at the time to generate data, such as having subjects push one button when they liked something and another when they disliked something, seemed vastly inadequate to Adorno, who believed that first one should examine the content of

the music itself on a large scale before field work could begin. Adorno relates the utter confusion he felt when he was asked by a colleague if the questionnaires for the music study had been sent out before Adorno even knew if the questions that he believed to be essential could be taken up with questionnaires: in retrospect, Adorno wrote that he still did not know if it were possible, because in his opinion no one had tried hard enough to solve what he considered a very difficult methodological problem.

Norman Holland, drawing on his considerable experience in studying actual responses to albeit different artistic stimuli, literary texts, appears to confirm what Adorno postulated about the great effect of mediation on results of empirical studies. Holland writes:

Most literary people believe that readers' readings, or (to use a general term) literents' experiences of literature, so overlap that we can safely assume a certain determinate core of shared "meaning." The text defines or limits something all literents share, although individual literents complete or vary that central experience in their individual ways. . . .

On the other hand, our analyses have shown over and over again no such overlap as would allow us to assume the text limits response in any significant way. If we leave readers on their own, as one might read a novel or a book of poems in an armchair at home, we find little or no commonality in what literents report about their responses to literature. To be sure, if we insist on a certain way of reading, as by a final examination in a course, a critical journal's requirements, or a psychologist's questionnaire, we do find similar phrasings in responses, but then, obviously, the similarities stem not from the text but from the reader's consenting to the constraints we added. Left to their own desires, literents have such variable experiences, it seems futile to think in terms of a core or limit to response set by the text.

In theoretical and more speculative arguments, Adorno comes to conclusions fairly similar to those of Holland. While Adorno concedes that it appears logical to eventually arrive at objective determinants of reaction via subjective material, for which he gives several potential reasons, he nevertheless writes:

Despite all of that, however, it remains unproven whether one can actually advance from opinions and types of reactions of individual persons to the social structure and social essence. Also the statistical average of those opinions is still, as Durkheim already recognized, an essence [Inbegriff] of subjectivity. ("Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," p. 710, my translation)<sup>8</sup>

What both Adorno and Holland seem to be addressing here is the terribly difficult problem of mediational influence that inevitably affects the results of studies trying to come up with workable data documenting actual responses to objects as complex as artworks. Holland has learned through experience in empirical research that the reaction of readers to a large degree is influenced by the parameters of the experiment or by the very questions the researcher poses. This suggests that recipients have so internalized what they intuitively realize is an expected reaction under a specific circumstance, that uniformity of responses under this condition is more a product of reified thinking than of any text specific aspect of the stimulus.

Adorno is suspicious of the pervasive culture industry, that so dictates the responses of subjects molded by its ubiquitous reification as to strip individuals of their autonomy. This phenomenon is presumably operative in even the simplest stimulus/reaction relationship; however, when this relationship is complicated with a stimulus as multifaceted as an artwork, the problem of arriving at any reliable data is only compounded.

One could perhaps presume that the problems mediation spells for the analysis of art's effects on recipients would be even greater with literary stimuli than with the musical stimuli Adorno mostly worked with, since the semantic dimension of the literary text is more likely to set off reified responses than the abstract and less determined medium of music. This seems logical at first glance (and perhaps also when Adorno was writing) since it would appear that citizens

of the administered world could be conditioned most easily to the semantic content of words and associations used by advertisers, to name one area, to promote continually the urge to consume. However, recent times have seen the development of ever more subtle uses of music to sell products and influence behavior to the point that reified responses to music (and also the combination of music with video sequences) may be even more effective tools of manipulation than the traditional written advertisement. What this means is that even Adorno's revered realm of music (which he already years ago found nearly impossible to research with reception study techniques) has now been attacked even more by the culture industry and perhaps, at least in the area of popular music, vanquished.<sup>9</sup> And the reifying spell of the culture industry continues to proliferate.

If one questions the extent of reification surrounding semantic expression, one need only think of the process in reverse. For example, beginning writers in composition courses are often only able to represent even their least subtle subjective feelings or ideas with platitudinous expressions. Yet consider the inevitable response of such students to the teacher who points out an imprecise or cliché-ridden formulation in an essay: "but you know what I meant." Under further questioning, however, it usually becomes apparent that the pre-packaged language students have absorbed from sportscasters and advertisers is so inadequate that they themselves really have no idea what they meant. They have simply responded to key words in assignments with the only phrases on the subject at their disposal.

To illustrate a case of reified consciousness as he experienced it in the United States, Adorno cites a conversation he had with a female colleague in the Princeton project, who after a few days came to trust him enough to ask:

"Dr. Adorno, would you mind a personal question?" I said: "It depends on the question, but just go ahead," and she proceeded: "Please tell me: are you an extrovert or an introvert?" It was as if she already thought of herself as a living being according to the model of the cafeteria questions from questionnaires. She was content to subsume herself under those types of fixed and pre-given categories, similar approximately to when people, as one by now can observe frequently also in Germany, characterize themselves with the astrological sign under which they are born: "Sagittarius, Aries." Reified consciousness is by no means only at home in America. . . . ("Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika, pp. 711-712, my translation except for the dialogue, that appears in the original in English)<sup>10</sup>

Given the overwhelming impact of reification on the consciousness of people he observed, Adorno was all the more irritated by what he considered a methodological circle: ". . . that in order to get a grip on the phenomenon of cultural reification according to the valid norms of empirical sociology, one had to make use of reified methods themselves. . ." ("Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," p. 712, my translation).<sup>11</sup>

To summarize, Adorno was convinced that the study of response was both important and necessary. The problem with the empirical techniques he saw, however, was that the response data that were collected in such studies were treated as if they could provide privileged insight into response phenomena. What was either forgotten or overlooked was that these ostensibly primary data were in fact only epiphenomena of highly mediated processes. Both the stimulus itself and the response were mediated through and through, and failure to recognize this lent empirical studies far more legitimacy than they deserved.

To recognize such a problem, however, is not simultaneously to solve it, and Adorno candidly admitted that he had not succeeded in providing a systematic sociology and social psychology of music in radio, but rather only piecemeal models. He explained the shortcomings of his efforts as having to do with his inability to make the difficult transition to listener research successfully,

although a breakthrough in this area was in his opinion urgently needed, above all, for differentiating and correcting theorems.

It is an open question really only empirically to be answered, whether, to what extent, and in what dimensions social implications that are uncovered by content analysis of music are actually grasped by the listeners, and how they react to them. It would be naive if one wanted to impute right off an equivalence between the social implications of the stimulus and the "responses"; indeed no less naive would be to consider both as independent from each other as long as conducted research about the reactions is not available. ("Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," p. 718, my translation)<sup>12</sup>

In his work on the "Authoritarian Personality" project in Berkeley we can catch perhaps a glimpse of Adorno's only partial solution to the problem of collecting usable sociological data via questionnaires while at the same time at least minimizing mediational distortions. In developing the so-called F-scale, Adorno and the other researchers sought to construct indicators of authoritarian potential by devising questionnaires that they hoped would bypass subjects' conscious attempts sometimes to withhold such information. The strategy of the team involved constructing seemingly innocuous questions that, while quite distant from the main theme of the studies, nevertheless could be interpreted so as to provide more reliable data about the matter at hand. The studies were thus designed to provide insight not into actual opinions and dispositions of subjects, but rather the subjects' fascist potential.

#### Adorno's Case Against Reception Studies

At the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned that some critics either deny or only grudgingly concede Adorno's interest in matters of reception. To support the thesis that this attitude results from the tendency of critics to privilege one model of negativity over other competing models in Adorno's canon,

let us look for a moment at another side of Adorno (the side many American commentators on Adorno seem to privilege) that appears to deny interest in reception, an Adorno somewhat similar to the one who criticized the empirical sociology of Silbermann.

In Aesthetic Theory, for example, Adorno writes:

... the relationship of art to sociology is not to be found chiefly in the sphere of reception, but rather in the more basic sphere of production. Concern with the social explication of art has to address the production of art rather than content itself with investigating and classifying its impact (which in many cases diverges completely from art works and their objective social content, a divergence that can in turn be explained sociologically). Since time immemorial human responses to art works have been exceedingly mediated [Vermittelt]; they are not immediately [unmittelbar] related to the specificity of a work but are determined by society as a whole. In short, the study of effects fails to show what is social about art. Under the aegis of positivism, this approach has even usurped the right<sup>13</sup> to dictate norms for art to follow. (AT, p. 324, translation modified)

In this passage, a few important stances of Adorno toward reception emerge. Production is privileged over reception because it is "more basic." Also interesting in such passages where skepticism about the efficacy of reception studies is voiced is the stress on the "exceedingly mediate" nature of human responses to artworks. If we contrast this position with the alternate one discussed earlier that determined art's value based on its either unmediated or less mediated characteristics (because of its sensuous and nonconceptual nature), we can begin to see the problems Adorno's competing models produce. It also makes the hypothesis possible that critics who come down on the side of his staunch negativity model do so for a reason: they may not take seriously Adorno's utopian remarks about art being less mediated because he surely could not have meant that, or they consciously deemphasize this aspect of the theory and write it off as a case of bad theology, an unwanted influence of Benjamin.

or perhaps a polemic directed against a specific position that, for the sake of polemics, distorts Adorno's own position. The answer to this problem is perhaps to recall that the immediacy in Adorno's model of art as reconciliation is a construct that is perceived not necessarily by actual recipients, but rather through the philosophical process of immanent criticism.

Adorno's position against the validity of subjective responses to art is even more forcefully advanced in his essay "Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens," in which Adorno refers to the "liquidation of the individual" as "the actual signature of the new musical condition."<sup>14</sup> This process of liquidation has replaced the ability of the individual to perceive artworks in themselves with fetish categories that preclude an adequate response to art; such liquidation is so complete that empirical attempts to illustrate this process are bound to fail.

Whoever might try to "verify" the fetish character of music by researching listeners' reactions through interviews and questionnaires could be unexpectedly puzzled. In music, as elsewhere, the tension of essence and appearance has grown to the point where no appearance at all can be used anymore to prove essence unmediatedly [unvermittelt]. The unconscious reactions of listeners are so imperviously screened off, their conscious assessment [of music] orients itself so exclusively to the dominating fetish categories, that every answer one receives conforms beforehand to the surface of that music business that is attacked by the theory for which the "verification" is valid. Already at the point when one poses to the listener that primitive question about likes and dislikes, the entire mechanism comes efficaciously into play that one thought could be rendered transparent or eliminated by reducing it to this question. If one however tries at all to replace elementary experimental conditions with conditions that take into account the real dependence of the listener on the mechanism, then not only does every complication to the mode of investigation mean merely an increased difficulty in interpreting the results; it also sets off [potenziert] the resistances of the subjects and drives them all the deeper into the conformist behavior in which they believe to find sanctuary from the danger of being exposed. No approximate causal nexus between isolated "impressions" [Einwirkungen] of hit songs and their psychological effects on the listener can be interpreted out cleanly. If individuals today really do not belong to themselves anymore, then that also means that they can no longer be

"influenced" [beeinflußt]. ("Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik," pp. 32-33, my translation)<sup>15</sup>

#### Adorno's Attack on Pleasure and Response

Another aspect of his attack on reception that has led Hans Robert Jauss to call Adorno's position puritanism surrounds an attack on subjective pleasure in aesthetic experience. "The subjectivist approach to art simply fails to understand that the subjective experience of art in itself is meaningless, and that in order to grasp the importance of art one has to zero in on the artistic object rather than on the fun of the art lover" (AT, p. 20).<sup>16</sup> In place of pleasure, Adorno argues for the traumatizing qualities of art.

As works of art open themselves to contemplation, they begin to irritate the viewer, who becomes uncertain of his distance and his role as a mere spectator. The highest summit of art may be this instant of awareness, where the subject realizes that the truth of an art work ought actually to be the truth about himself. This instant redeems subjectivity, including subjective, feeling-oriented aesthetics, by negating it. Traumatized by art, the subject is able to experience itself properly, dissolving its petrified features and waking up to the narrowness of its self-posed standpoint. Trauma is the true happiness the subject can find in art works. But it is a happiness fashioned against, and in spite of, the subject. . . . (AT, pp. 379-80)<sup>17</sup>

Adorno's attack on the viewer is interesting because it reveals quite a traditional assessment of the recipient's role in aesthetic experience. "The relation between the viewer and work had nothing to do with the incorporation of art by the viewer. On the contrary, the viewer seemed to vanish in the work of art. This holds a fortiori for the products of modern art that come at the viewer sometimes like train engines in a film" (AT, p. 19).<sup>18</sup>

Adorno's rejection of the subjective pleasure that results from identification is a logical extension of his efforts to restrain the almost bellicose traits he

sees in the domination of identity thinking. Adorno apparently suspects that such pleasure is only accomplished at the cost of the artwork's right to exist as it is; artworks, he therefore stresses, should not be justified solely by what subjects can get out of them.

A good example of a banalistic person is a reader who judges literature according to whether or not he can identify with the protagonists. In general, false identification with the fictitious but nevertheless empirical persons in literature is one of the most obvious marks of artistic ignorance. What it does is lessen the distance to the work while at the same time singling out its aura of superiority for consumption. Identification, it is true, is required even by those who have an authentic relation to art in that they must enter into the work, participating in its dynamic or, as Benjamin says, "breathing its aura." But the true medium of identification is the Hegelian notion of "freedom towards the object." Instead of projecting on to the work what goes on in his head, so as to see himself confirmed and satisfied on a higher plane, the viewer must externalize himself, recreating the work and assimilating himself to it. Another way of putting this point is to demand of him that he subordinate himself to the discipline of the work, rather than promising him that he will get something out of art. (AT, pp. 386-7).<sup>19</sup>

As Adorno concludes, such gauche attitudes toward art undercut the efforts of those seeking to investigate reception issues because they destroy the very qualities of art that make it important.

Aesthetic blindness and ignorance on the one hand focus on the empirical in art works and on the other engage in pedestrian projection, which today is as ubiquitous as it is destructive of art works. This reflects two correlative aspects of the desubstantialization of art works: one, the tendency to view them as things among things; and, two, to turn them into receptacles for the psychology of the viewer. As mere things they lose the ability to articulate something, and that is precisely why they can turn into receptacles for the viewer's psyche. (AT, p. 387)<sup>20</sup>

Another aspect of Adorno's case against reception studies is at least hinted at in Aesthetic Theory. In that work, Adorno suggests that the emphasis on

responses that reception studies most certainly promote also tempts art to play to these responses in order to meet the demands of the market.

With the growth of subjective differentiation and the intensification and expansion of aesthetic stimuli came the shift to market-oriented cultural production. Attuning art to ephemeral individual responses meant allying it with reification. As art became more and more similar to physical subjectivity, it moved more and more away from objectivity, ingratiating itself with the public. To that extent, the code-word of l'art pour l'art is the opposite of what it claims to be. (AT, p. 339)<sup>21</sup>

This quote addresses some of the problems a heightened sense of reception poses with arguments that are consistent with many themes we saw earlier. Adorno distrusts mass judgment, since it is conditioned, perhaps even programmed, by the culture industry. For this reason, public whims can hardly be a good judge of existent art, nor should they be allowed to dictate rules to future art. Yet an art that tries to please the taste of the masses can scarcely do so by remaining noncommunicative; it would thus sacrifice its autonomy if it tried to attune itself to the demands of the masses.

The above quote also sheds some light on Adorno's use of the terms "subjective" and "objective." He opposes an art that moves toward the public taste by forfeiting its "objectivity." Thus, objectivity in Adorno's terminology implies an autonomy and freedom of the artwork from the attempts of recipients to dominate it by making it follow their subjective rules. This plea for objectivity is consistent with Adorno's attempts to find a way out of the domination of identity thinking. It thus becomes clear why Adorno does not want the subject pole, which already is much too powerful, to be legitimized and reenforced even further by reception investigators. In addition to these fears comes Adorno's strong conviction that the judgment of recipients, who hardly belong to themselves, is factually false anyway.

Adorno's Move to Suppress the Subject

Adorno thus seems determined to beat down the recipient in the equation of aesthetic experience. To do this, he follows at least two different strategies, both determined to reduce the subject's power.

One strategy dictates that authentic reception is marked by the subject's disappearance in the art object that results from the concern art evokes during the act of aesthetic reception. As we already saw, this reaction is diametrically opposed to the pleasure seeking attitude generally associated with art appreciation.

A legitimate subjective response to art is a sense of perplexed surprise [Betroffenheit] triggered by great works. This feeling is not some repressed emotion in the recipient that is brought to the surface by art but a momentary discomfiture, more precisely a tremor [Erschütterung], during which the recipient forgets himself and disappears in the object. (AT, p. 346, translation modified)<sup>22</sup>

Adorno also refers to the "self-negation of the viewer, who tended to vanish in the work" as what in philosophical aesthetics "elevated the subject to freedom-- or, in its own parlance, . . . enabled it to transcend space and time" (AT, p. 375).<sup>23</sup> It may be recalled that the model for such aesthetic experience Adorno and Horkheimer described in Dialectic of Enlightenment as Odysseus's temporary loss of himself to the rapturing song of the Sirens.

The other strategy Adorno employs to reduce the subject's power is to advocate that distance between art and the recipient be preserved.

The distance of the aesthetic realm from the world of practical ends has its analogue in art itself as the distance of aesthetic objects from the viewing subject. Just as art cannot intervene in the practical world, so the subject cannot intervene in the aesthetic object. This distance is the precondition for the subject's proximity to the content of art works. Kant enshrined the notion of distance in his concept of

disinterestedness which postulates a kind of hands-off orientation vis-à-vis the aesthetic object. (AT, p. 429)<sup>24</sup>

The common point in these two positions is the attempt to relegate the otherwise suffocating presence of the identity-seeking subject under the objective artwork in authentic aesthetic experience. This is why artworks are so crucial to Adorno: only they have the power to fend off the advances of the subject desperately seeking control.

Part of the demand art places upon the recipient to accomplish his relegation of the subject is the decree that reception must follow art's own objective rules. But how does this take place according to Adorno? One major element of this process is a subject sufficiently informed about art so as to be able to recognize and be sensitive to its immanent form.<sup>25</sup> Such awareness demands of the recipient virtually the same extent of knowledge as that of the artist himself.

Adequate reception cannot be less reflective than the work it receives. Far from enjoying the privilege of intuitive understanding, the person who does not know what he sees and hears is simply unable to see and hear. Consciousness is not a layer in some hierarchy of cognition, located a few rungs above sense perception. Rather, consciousness and sense perception are reciprocally dependent moments of aesthetic experience. Nor is any single work of art such an arrangement of layers superimposed on each other; it is only in the context of the culture industry and its reified consciousness that this misunderstanding takes hold. (AT, pp. 463-4)<sup>26</sup>

Adorno illustrates his point by referring to music.

Let us take complex, extensive music as an example. In it we notice how the threshold between primary perception and reflective consciousness shifts constantly. Frequently the appreciation of what a fleeting musical passage means depends on one's knowledge of the function and place of that passage in a whole which is ostensibly absent. And the allegedly immediate experience in turn depends on a moment other than pure immediacy. Ideally, art appreciation would be a process wherein the mediated work becomes immediate. In the last

analysis, then, naiveté is the aim and end-point of aesthetic reception, never its origin or starting point. (AT, p. 464)<sup>27</sup>

These passages perhaps provide additional evidence for the critics we discussed earlier who find Adorno's aesthetic considerations elitist.<sup>28</sup> But they are also of interest for what they reveal about the role mediation plays in reception. Immediacy is not possible, since all perception is mediated. Still, adequate knowledge of art and its organization allows the informed recipient to simulate a constructed immediacy in the act of aesthetic experience. That this immediacy is a construct remains consistent with everything we have presented so far about Adorno's aesthetics.

To summarize, Adorno's theory, by emphasizing the truth one can discern through experiencing the freedom of the artwork, appears to beg questions that only analyses of reception could answer. For this reason, Adorno was interested in reception. However, another strong strand of Adorno's thought includes his conviction that the liquidated citizen of the administered world is no longer capable of articulating, or for that matter, even correctly experiencing art. Thus, reception studies, as Adorno knew them, were ill-equipped to provide insight into the objective qualities of artworks.

In the years since Adorno's Aesthetic Theory was published, several theorists have shifted the focus of their research and concentrated their efforts on the reception pole of aesthetic experience. Among the better known of these critics are the Constance theorists Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser who, despite highly disparate positions and interests, are often considered together. One common link between them, however, is their interest in communicative functions of literature which, as we already pointed out in the remarks of Iser, put them both at odds with many of Adorno's positions. In defending art's

communicative function, Jauss has been the vocal spokesperson from Constance, presumably because his own theory of aesthetic response, at least in its early stages, was more closely associated with Adorno's than was Iser's, as we shall see. Let us briefly turn our attention to Jauss's work to see whether his criticisms of Adorno suggest any solutions to the reception problems Adorno confronted.

#### Jauss's Attack on Adorno

In his Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics, Jauss wastes no time in launching his attack on Adorno.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the first major thesis of the book is posed as a direct answer to Adorno. In response to Adorno's warning that "Artistic experience is autonomous only when it rids itself of taste and its pleasures," Jauss writes:

My thesis opposes this aesthetic purism: that attitude of enjoyment which art creates and makes possible is the aesthetic experience par excellence which underlies both preautonomous and autonomous art. It must again become the object of theoretical reflection where renewed meaning is to be given to the aesthetic practice of a productive,<sup>30</sup> receptive, and communicative attitude for our time. (Jauss, p. 21)

Similarly, Jauss stated in an interview:

The sharpest criticism of all pleasurable art experience is in the posthumous esthetic theory of Theodor W. Adorno, who attacks all enjoyment of art as false consciousness of the late-capitalistic consumer culture. Adorno, and the currently popular esthetics of negativity, stand in a long tradition of puritanical hostility towards art, which connects such mighty names as Plato, Augustine, Rousseau, and Kierkegaard.<sup>31</sup>

Jauss believes that to characterize art chiefly by its negativity is too limited. For example, negativity and positivity are inadequate terms to apply to

art since they often turn into their opposites in the course of a work's historical reception.

To the extent that they become "classical" by attaining public significance through incorporation in institutions that confer cultural sanction and ultimately reaffirm, as cultural legacy, precisely those authoritative traditions whose validity they denied or infringed upon at the time of their appearance, even works of a negative character tend to lose their original negativity in the process of their reception. We are familiar with this phenomenon in modern art where expressions of protest, criticism, and revolt inevitably turn into the enjoyment of such negations when the provoked public absorbs the provocation and sees it at an aesthetic distance. . . . If one sees it in the larger perspective of its reception and interpretation, the history of the arts has always shown the swing of the pendulum between "transgressive function" and interpretive assimilation of works. (Jauss, Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics, p. 16)<sup>32</sup>

Negativity also cannot explain why art is produced or received, an explanation of which must add to the theory some place for aesthetic pleasure, as Jauss points out by quoting Adorno: "but if the last trace of pleasure be extirpated, the question why there should be works of art at all would be difficult to answer" (AT, p. 27; cited in Jauss, p. 28).

Another facet of Jauss's criticism charges that Adorno's stance against communication also forfeits any claim to intersubjectivity. To Jauss, this is a major loss for a Marxist thinker, since without intersubjectivity art can hardly be revolutionary.

. . . esthetics of negativity cannot require that art achieve a communicative, let alone a revolutionary function. As long as an esthetic theory such as that of Adorno or of the Tel Quel group is not in the position to describe esthetic activity within intersubjective categories, it will remain individualistic and idealistic from the onset, even if it acknowledges materialism. (Jauss Interview, p. 60)

As we have seen in previous chapters, this is a problem that has led many commentators on Adorno to charge him with individualistic elitism. This

tendency in Adorno, however, seems grounded in the German Idealist tradition that convinced the philosopher that the present could only be a wound. It is therefore no surprise that Adorno should reject communication, for communication only accelerates the exchange of false ideas that, like contaminating germs, exacerbate the disease of the culture industry. This position makes it clear why Adorno would not want what Jauss claims is lacking in the former's theory.

What Jauss only hints at is that his criticism of Adorno is to some extent criticism of his own position in his probably most famous essay, "Literary History as Challenge," in which he theorizes that "the way in which a literary work, at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience obviously provides a criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value."<sup>33</sup> As Jauss posits in that essay, the aesthetic distance of a literary work, defined as the distance between the work and the expectations of the audience, depend on art's norm-breaking potential for this distance. The less the aesthetic distance, the closer the work comes to the sphere of entertainment art (Unterhaltungskunst).

This definition hardly differs from Adorno's statements about art's autonomy; "norm-breaking" potential can be equated with negativity in Adorno's theory. We can thus see that the foundation of Jauss's early theoretical considerations could easily be characterized as a negative aesthetic. Yet Jauss is not willing to accept the implications for art and criticism Adorno derived from negative aesthetics. For this reason, Jauss's debate with Adorno could be viewed as Jauss's attempt to come to terms with one of his own major theoretical premises.

One result of this struggle is a reformulation in Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics of Jauss's position on norm-breaking negativity.

In the secular history of preautonomous art, the antithetical emancipatory and conservative effects of art do not exhaust the field of aesthetic experience. Between the extremes of the norm-breaking and the norm-fulfilling function, between the progressive change of horizon and the adaptation to a ruling ideology, there lies an entire range of frequently overlooked possibilities for the social effectiveness of art which can be referred to as communicative in the social sense. They include both the norm-creating (establishing, initiating, heightening, justifying) achievement of heroic art and the immense role didactic art had in the transmission, distribution, and elucidation of the knowledge of the daily praxis of life as it is passed on from one generation to the next. (Jauss, p. 154)<sup>34</sup>

This reformulation is accompanied by the criticism of Adorno that we have already touched upon.

The Adorno-Jauss debate reveals several interesting similarities in the parties' respective aesthetic theories. Both thinkers, for example, seem burdened by implications of their closely related points of departure (negativity). For Adorno, as we have seen, his speculations about art's negative function seem to beg confirmation that only a serious analysis of the subject could provide. Adorno, however, does not trust the subject.

Jauss's difficulty is similar: he wishes to award the subject an important role in his study of reception aesthetics, a fundamental element of his theory of aesthetic experience and communication. For this reason Jauss rejects Adorno's view of art as noncommunicative negation of society, for such a view leaves little room for aesthetic response. One could guess that with the program Jauss had set for himself, he might have made progress toward overcoming some of the methodological barriers Adorno described in those instances when he seemed disposed to consider reception. But this does not seem to have happened, mainly

because Jauss ultimately assigns to actual recipients even less of a place in his theory than Adorno. Let us examine why this happened.

As we have seen, Adorno did attempt to develop a program for assessing recipient response during his exile in the United States, but complained that such attempts were largely unsuccessful. On the other hand, Jauss took the path of many "reader-response" critics by substituting a subject derived from the text (a construct that one must say transforms Jauss into the "reader" of which he writes) for actual readers. The reasons for doing this are probably the same that prevented Adorno from successfully analyzing actual responses to art. (Those who have chosen to take the path of strict empirical evaluation of response, we should probably mention, are often criticized for the disappointingly commonsensical interpretations of their often enormous amounts of data; such studies often consist of almost endless statistical analyses that hardly lead to surprising conclusions).<sup>35</sup> What seems to come of the seemingly insurmountable methodological problems Adorno spelled out for empirical research is that Jauss and other critics eventually bracket out real recipients and replace them with more manageable constructs--implied readers, informed readers, super readers, etc. What this means is that we can probably not look to these critics to provide answers to reception problems Adorno raised.

This means too that some of Jauss's criticism of Adorno is perhaps not sensitive enough to the differences between the two thinkers, as Albrecht Wellmer has pointed out. In an argument similar to the one he brought against Bürger, Wellmer states that Jauss's dispute with Adorno on the issue of communication reveals an unwillingness on Jauss's part to take Adorno's statements seriously.

H. R. Jauss has argued against Adorno by calling on the communicative functions of art. That these functions do not come up in Adorno has a good reason: problems of reception and communication can only be posed in connection with art when Adorno's unequivocally construed interreferentiality of reality, artwork, and utopia is called into question. If, on the contrary, this interreferentiality is actually presupposed, then problems of reception and communication exhaust themselves and become problems of appropriate compilation [Erfassung] of this directed interreferentiality itself: what counts is alone the genuine experience of artworks and the process of deciphering them philosophically. (Wellmer, pp. 152-53)<sup>36</sup>

Thus, while Jauss's objections to Adorno's work are provocative and interesting, these questions are really only possible because Jauss was able to circumvent the real recipient in his theorizing about reception (and about the history of reception as well).<sup>37</sup> This is not meant as a criticism of theorists who choose to circumvent actual respondents. (After all, most of Adorno's critical essays on actual artworks are marked by the same tendency: we have seen, for example, that Adorno derives his statements about mediation from the artwork itself, much as Jauss illustrates reception issues based on his own various readings of the actual work.) I merely wish to point out that Jauss and Adorno are working on different aspects of reception problems and that comparisons of the two may not always be fair to either theorist.

#### Dénouement

We have seen that Adorno's feelings about reception issues are mixed. While the value he places on the reconciliatory potential of art's negativity suggests a place for reception studies to assess the efficacy of this potential and the manner in which negativity affects the subject, his despair about the advanced stage of subject obliteration at the hands of the culture industry fuels

his pessimism that such studies cannot yield interpretable data: actual responses are only reified responses.

If reception has a place at all in Adorno's aesthetics, it is in the reception of artworks not by actual subjects, but rather by the immanent criticism of philosophy. We will therefore make this process the subject of the following chapter, in which we will attempt to answer several questions our efforts so far have raised: To what extent can Adorno's own critical essays act as models for the philosophically guided process of immanent criticism Adorno describes? How does Adorno intend that we follow the objective structure of the artwork without having it obscured by our critical/interpretative activity? How are we to imagine the constructed immediacy of art through criticism?

Notes

<sup>1</sup> An example of a critic who misreads or at least greatly oversimplifies Adorno's position on reception is Peter Uwe Hohendahl who in his "Introduction to Reception Aesthetics" writes: "Neither historicism nor textual criticism, or even Critical Theory (Adorno), could concede more than a marginal position to the study of reception. . . . The reader, spectator or listener does not appear as an independent category determining the work because Adorno never questions the hermeneutic act of understanding. Competence is assumed; the recipient is always an ideal construction which thus cannot violate the text" New German Critique, No. 10 (Winter 1977), pp. 29, 32. Martin Jay is more accurate when he writes: "It was . . . to the paradoxically de-aestheticized aesthetic experience that Adorno, for all his dislike of reception aesthetics, turned for the most likely antidote to reification" (Adorno, p. 158). In this chapter, however, I hope to show that Adorno's "paradoxical" turn to reception aesthetics is actually a logical result of one of the two competing and probably irreconcilable models of negativity introduced in Chapter III.

<sup>2</sup> "Ich fühlle mich durchaus mißverstanden, wenn meine musiksoziologischen Publikationen seit der Rückkehr aus der Emigration als der empirischen Sozialforschung entgegengesetzt betrachtet werden."

<sup>3</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika," pp. 718-19, my translation. "Meine eigene Position in der Kontroverse zwischen empirischer und theoretischer Soziologie, die oft, vor allem hierzulande, ganz falsch dargestellt wurde, möchte ich grob und in aller Kürze so präzisieren, daß mir empirische Untersuchungen, auch im Bereich von Kulturphänomenen, nicht nur legitim sondern notwendig erscheinen. Man darf sie aber nicht hypostasieren und als Universalschlüssel betrachten. Vor allem müssen sie selbst in theoretischer Erkenntnis terminieren. Theorie ist kein bloßes Vehikel, das überflüssig würde, sobald man die Daten einmal zur Verfügung hat."

<sup>4</sup> The biographical information in this section is based on Adorno's own account of his experiences in America, as documented in the essay "Wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen in Amerika." For more on Adorno's experiences in the United States, see Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973) and Jay, "Adorno in Amerika," in Adorno-Konferenz 1983, pp. 354-387.

<sup>5</sup> "Ich war durchaus gesonnen, auf jene berühmte other side of the fence mich zu begeben, also Hörrreaktionen zu studieren, und weiß noch, wieviel Freude ich hatte, und wieviel ich lernte, als ich selbst, zu meiner Orientierung, eine Reihe von freilich recht wildwüchsigen, der Systematik entratenden Interviews durchführte."

<sup>6</sup> "Was nach den Spielregeln des orthodoxen social research axiomatisch war, der Ausgang von den Reaktionsweisen der Probanden als von einem Priären, der letzten Rechtsquelle soziologischer Erkenntnis, schien mir ein durchaus Vermitteltes und Abgeleitetes. Oder, vorsichtiger: es wäre erst von der Forschung zu ermitteln gewesen, inwieweit derlei subjektive Reaktionen der Probanden tatsächlich so spontan und unmittelbar sind, wie die Probanden meinen, oder wieweit dahinter nicht nur die Verbreitungsmechanismen und die Suggestionskraft des Apparats, sondern auch die objektiven Implikationen der Medien und des Materials stehen, mit dem die Hörer konfrontiert werden--und schließlich weit übergreifende gesellschaftliche Strukturen, bis hinauf zu der der Gesamtgesellschaft. Allein jedoch, daß ich von objektiven Implikaten der Kunst ausging, anstatt von statistisch meßbaren Hörerreaktionen, kollidierte mit den positivistischen Denkgewohnheiten, wie sie in der amerikanischen Wissenschaft fast unbestritten galten."

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Interview: Wolfgang Iser," Diacritics (June 1980), 58-59.

<sup>8</sup> "Trotz alldem jedoch ist unbewiesen, ob tatsächlich von Meinungen und Reaktionsweisen einzelner Personen zur Gesellschaftsstruktur und zum gesellschaftlichen Wesen fortgeschritten werden kann. Auch der statistische Durchschnitt jener Meinungen ist, wie bereits Durkheim erkannte, noch ein Inbegriff von Subjektivität."

<sup>9</sup> Adorno already saw the beginnings of this development in Wagner's Leitmotiv that stayed with the listener to be sung and hummed long after the musical piece with its original context was forgotten. With the Leitmotiv began the packaging of "serious" music into bite-sized pieces that even the least discriminating music consumer could love.

<sup>10</sup> "Dr. Adorno, would you mind a personal question?" Ich sagte: 'It depends on the question, but just go ahead', und sie fuhr fort: 'Please tell me: are you an extrovert or an introvert?' Es war, als dächte sie bereits als lebendiges Wesen nach dem Modell der Cafeteria-Fragen aus Questionnaires. Sie mochte sich selbst unter derlei starre und vorgegebene Kategorien subsumieren, ähnlich wie man es mittlerweile vielfach auch in Deutschland beobachten kann, etwa wenn Leute sich durch Sternbildzeichen charakterisieren, unter denen sie geboren sind: 'Schützenfrau, Widdermann'. Verdinglichtes Bewußtsein ist keineswegs nur in Amerika zu Hause. . . ."

<sup>11</sup> ". . . daß man, um nach den geltenden Normen empirischer Soziologie das Phänomen kultureller Verdinglichung in den Griff zu bekommen, sich selbst verdinglichter Methoden bedienen müsse. . . ."

<sup>12</sup> "Es ist eine offene, tatsächlich nur empirisch zu beantwortende Frage, ob, wieweit, in welchen Dimensionen die in musikalischer content analysis aufgedeckten gesellschaftlichen Implikationen von den Hörern auch aufgefaßt

werden, und wie sie darauf reagieren. Naiv wäre es, wollte man ohne weiteres eine Äquivalenz zwischen den gesellschaftlichen Implikationen der Reize und der 'responses' unterstellen, nicht weniger naiv allerdings, beides so lange als unabhängig voneinander zu betrachten, wie ausgeführte Forschungen über die Reaktionen nicht vorliegen."

13 ". . . das Verhältnis der Kunst zur Gesellschaft [ist] nicht vorwiegend in der Sphäre der Rezeption aufzusuchen. Es ist dieser vorgängig: in der Produktion. Das Interesse an der gesellschaftlichen Dechiffrierung der Kunst muß dieser sich zukehren, anstatt mit der Ermittlung und Klassifizierung von Wirkungen sich abspeisen zu lassen, die vielfach aus gesellschaftlichem Grunde von den Kunstwerken und ihrem objektiven gesellschaftlichen Gehalt gänzlich divergieren. Die menschlichen Reaktionen auf Kunstwerke sind seit undenklichen Zeiten aufs äußerste vermittelt, nicht unmittelbar auf die Sache bezogen; heute gesamtgesellschaftlich. Wirkungsforschung reicht weder an Kunst als gesellschaftliches heran noch darf sie gar, wie sie unter positivistischem Geist es usurpiert, der Kunst Normen diktieren" (AT, pp. 338-39).

14 Theodor W. Adorno, "Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens" in Dissonanzen: Musik in der verwalteten Welt, Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 14 (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 21 (my translation). "Die Liquidierung des Individuums ist die eigentliche Signatur des neuen musikalischen Zustands."

15 "Wer es aber versuchte, den Fetischcharakter der Musik durch Erforschung von Hörerreaktionen, durch Interviews und Fragebogen zu 'verifizieren', der könnte unversehens vexiert werden. In der Musik wie sonstwo ist die Spannung von Wesen und Erscheinung derart angewachsen, daß überhaupt keine Erscheinung unvermittelt mehr zum Beleg des Wesens taugt. Die unbewußten Reaktionen der Hörer sind so dicht abgeblendet, ihre bewußte Rechenschaft orientiert sich so ausschließlich an den herrschenden Fetischkategorien, daß jede Antwort, die man erhält, vorweg mit der Oberfläche jenes Musikbetriebs konformiert, welche von der Theorie angegriffen wird, der die 'Verifizierung' gilt. Schon wenn man einem Hörer jene primitive Frage nach Gefallen oder Mißfallen vorlegt, kommt der gesamte Mechanismus wirksam ins Spiel, von dem man meint, er könne durch die Reduktion auf diese Frage transparent gemacht und eliminiert werden. Trachtet man aber gar, elementare Versuchsbedingungen durch solche zu ersetzen, die der realen Abhängigkeit des Hörers vom Mechanismus Rechnung tragen, so bedeutet jede Komplikation des Versuchsmodus nicht bloß eine Erschwerung der Interpretierbarkeit der Resultate, sondern potenziert die Widerstände der Versuchspersonen und treibt sie nur um so tiefer in die konformistische Verhaltensweise hinein, in der sie sich vor der Gefahr von Enthüllungen geborgen meinen. Es läßt sich kein Kausalnexus etwa zwischen isolierten 'Einwirkungen' der Schlager und deren psychologischen Effekten auf die Hörer säuberlich herauspräparieren. Wenn wirklich heute die Individuen nicht länger sich selbst mehr gehören, dann bedeutet das auch, daß sie nicht länger mehr 'beeinflußt' werden."

16 "... der subjektive Ansatz [verblendet] vorweg dagegen, daß über künstlerische Erfahrung nur im Verhältnis zur Sache etwas Triftiges sich ausmachen läßt, nicht am Gaudium des Liebhabers" (ÄT, p. 28).

17 "Während die Kunstwerke der Betrachtung sich öffnen, beirren sie zugleich den Betrachter in seiner Distanz, der des bloßen Zuschauers; ihm geht die Wahrheit des Werkes auf als die, welche auch die Wahrheit seiner selbst sein sollte. Der Augenblick dieses Übergangs ist der oberste von Kunst. Er errettet Subjektivität, sogar subjektive Ästhetik durch ihre Negation hindurch. Das von Kunst erschütterte Subjekt macht reale Erfahrungen; nun jedoch, kraft der Einsicht ins Kunstwerk als Kunstwerk solche, in denen seine Verhärtung in der eigenen Subjektivität sich löst, seiner Selbstsetzung ihre Beschränktheit aufgeht. Hat das Subjekt in der Erschütterung sein wahres Glück an den Kunstwerken, so ist es eines gegen das Subjekt. . ." (ÄT, p. 401).

18 "Das Verhältnis zur Kunst war keines von Einverleibung, sondern umgekehrt verschwand der Betrachter in der Sache; erst recht ist das der Fall in modernen Gebilden, die auf jenen zufahren wie zuweilen Lokomotiven im Film" (ÄT, p. 27).

19 "Wie es der Schulfall von Banausie ist, wenn ein Leser sein Verhältnis zu Kunstwerken danach reguliert, ob er mit darin vorkommenden Personen sich identifizieren kann, so ist die falsche Identifikation mit der unmittelbaren empirischen Person das Amusische schlechthin. Sie ist das Herabsetzen der Distanz bei gleichzeitigen isolierenden Konsum der Aura als 'etwas Höherem'. Wohl verlangt auch das authentische Verhältnis zum Kunstwerk einen Akt der Identifikation: in die Sache eingehen, mitvollziehen, wie Benjamin sagt: 'die Aura atmen'. Aber sein Medium ist, was Hegel die Freiheit zum Objekt nennt: nicht muß der Betrachter, was in ihm vorgeht, aufs Kunstwerk projizieren, um darin sich bestätigt, überhöht, befriedigt zu finden, sondern muß umgekehrt zum Kunstwerk sich entäußern, ihm sich gleichmachen, es von sich aus vollziehen. Daß er der Disziplin des Werks sich zu unterwerfen habe und nicht zu verlangen, daß das Kunstwerk ihm etwas gebe, ist nur ein anderer Ausdruck dafür" (ÄT, pp. 409-410).

20 "Die ästhetische Verhaltensweise aber, die dem sich entzieht, also blind bleibt gegen das, was am Kunstwerk mehr ist als der Fall, ist eins mit der projektiven Haltung, der des terre à terre, die in der gegenwärtigen Epoche insgesamt liegt und die Kunstwerke entkunstet. Daß sie einerseits zu Dingen unter anderen, andererseits zu Gefäßen für die Psychologie des Betrachters werden, ist dabei korrelativ. Als bloße Dinge sprechen sie nicht mehr; dafür werden sie zu Rezeptakeln des Betrachters" (ÄT, p. 410).

21 "Die Einstimmung der Kunst auf flüchtigste individuelle Reaktionen verbündete sich mit ihrer Verdinglichung, ihre zunehmende Ähnlichkeit mit subjektiv Physischem entfernte sie in der Breite der Produktion von ihrer

Objektivität und empfahl sich dem Publikum; insofern war die Parole l'art pour l'art das Deckbild ihres Gegenteils" (AT, p. 355).

22 "Betroffenheit durch bedeutende Werke benutzt diese nicht als Auslöser für eigene, sonst verdrängte Emotionen. Sie gehört dem Augenblick an, in denen der Rezipierende sich vergißt und im Werk verschwindet: dem von Erschütterung" (AT, p. 363).

23 "Was die philosophische Ästhetik zum Befreienden, nach ihrer Sprache Raum und Zeit Transzendentierenden der Kunst überhöhte, war die Selbstnegation des Betrachtenden, der im Werk virtuell erlischt" (AT, p. 396).

24 "Die Distanz des ästhetischen Bereichs von den praktischen Zwecken erscheint innerästhetisch als Ferne der ästhetischen Objekte von dem betrachtenden Subjekt; wie die Kunsterwerke nicht eingreifen, so kann es nicht eingreifen in jene, Distanz ist die erste Bedingung der Nähe zum Gehalt der Werke. Im Kantschen Begriff der Interesselosigkeit, der vom ästhetischen Verhalten fordert, es solle nicht nach dem Objekt greifen, nicht es verschlingen, ist das notiert" (AT, p. 460). This quote continues with an interesting remark about differences in opinion between Adorno and Benjamin concerning aesthetic distance. "Benjamin, too, testified to the significance of distance with his notion of aura, except that he saw aura as belonging to a past phase of artistic development, one that had recently been superseded by mechanical reproduction where the idea of distance is no longer valid. Identifying with the aggressor, Benjamin all too readily succumbed to the present trend that seeks to re-integrate art in the realm of practical ends. Phenomenal distance is that aspect of art works whereby they transcend mere being. By contrast, total elimination of distance, as advocated by Benjamin, amounts to the total integration of art in empirical life" (AT, p. 429). ["Die Benjaminsche Definition der Aura hat dies innerästhetische Moment getroffen, jedoch einem vergangenen Stadium zugeordnet und für das gegenwärtige der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit als ungültig erklärt. Er hat dabei, in Identifikation mit dem Angreifer, alzu prompt die historische Tendenz sich zugeeignet, welche Kunst in den empirischen Zweckbereich zurückruft. Ferne ist als Phänomen, was an Kunsterwerken deren bloßes Dasein transzendent; ihre absolute Nähe wäre ihre absolute Integration" (AT, p. 460).] On the Adorno-Benjamin dispute, see note 16 in Chapter II.

25 This awareness is basic to the immanent method of criticism we have already touched upon and which will be taken up in greater detail in the following chapter.

26 "keine adäquate [Rezeption] kann unreflektierter sein als das Rezipierte. Wer nicht weiß, was er sieht oder hört, genießt nicht das Privileg unmittelbaren Verhaltens zu den Werken, sondern ist unfähig, sie wahrzunehmen. Bewußtsein ist keine Schicht einer Hierarchie, welche über der Wahrnehmung sich aufbaute, sondern alle Momente der ästhetischen Erfahrung sind reziprok. Kein

Kunstwerk besteht in einem Übereinander der Schichten; das ist erst das Ergebnis kulturindustriellen Kalkuls, des verdinglichten Bewußtseins" (ÄT, p. 502).

<sup>27</sup> "An komplexer und ausgedehnter Musik etwa ist zu beobachten, daß die Schwelle dessen, was primär wahrgenommen und was durchs Bewußtsein, durch reflektierende Wahrnehmung bestimmt ist, variiert. Oft hängt das Verständnis des Sinns einer flüchtigen musikalischen Passage davon ab, daß man ihren Stellenwert im nichtgegenwärtigen Ganzen intellektiv kennt; die vorgeblich unmittelbare Erfahrung ihrerseits von einem Moment, das über reine Unmittelbarkeit hinausgeht. Die ideale Wahrnehmung von Kunstwerken wäre die, in welcher das dargestalt Vermittelte unmittelbar wird; Naivität ist Ziel, nicht Ursprung" (ÄT, p. 502).

<sup>28</sup> See "Elitism" in Chapter II.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> In the final version of Jauss's book, Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1982), in which Jauss revises and extends his remarks on Adorno, this direct quote no longer appears. The argument, however, remains virtually identical with the earlier version. This English translation is based on Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik I (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1977).

<sup>31</sup> "Interview/Hans Robet Jauss," Diacritics 5/6 (Spring 1975), p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> "auch Werke negativen Charakters pflegen im Prozeß ihrer Rezeption ihre ursprüngliche Negativität in dem Maße einzubüßen, wie sie selbst wieder 'klassisch' werden, durch Einverleibung in Institutionen kultureller Sanktionierung öffentliche Bedeutung erlangen und schließlich als Bildungsberbe gerade jene autoritative Tradition wieder befestigen können, deren Geltung sie bei ihrem Erscheinen vereinten oder durchbrachen. Dieser Prozeß ist uns aus moderner Kunst vertraut, wo Manifestationen von Protest, Kritik und Revolte unweigerlich in den Genuß solcher Negationen umzuschlagen pflegen, sobald das provozierte Publikum die Provokation wieder aufgefangen und in ästhetische Distanz gebracht hat. . . . Die Geschichte der Künste, sieht man sie in der erweiterten Perspektive ihrer Rezeption und Interpretation, zeigt immer schon den Pendelschlag zwischen 'transgressiver Funktion' und interpretierender Angleichung der Werke" (Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik (1982), pp. 47-48).

<sup>33</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 25. ["Die Art und Weise, in der ein literar-

isches Werk im historischen Augenblick seines Erscheinens die Erwartungen seines ersten Publikums einlöst, übertrifft, enttäuscht oder widerlegt, gibt offensichtlich ein Kriterium für die Bestimmung seines ästhetischen Wertes her"  
Literaturgeschichte als Provokation (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 177-178.]

<sup>34</sup> "Asthetische Erfahrung geht in der säkularen Geschichte der vorautonomen Kunst keineswegs in den Gegensätzlichkeiten von emanzipatorischer und bewahrender Wirkung der Kunst auf. Zwischen den Extremen der normbrechenden und der normerfüllenden Funktion, zwischen progressivem Horizontwandel und Anpassung an eine herrschende Ideologie, liegt eine ganze Reihe von heute oft übersehenen Möglichkeiten gesellschaftlicher Wirkung der Kunst, die man im sozialen Sinn als kommunikativ, nämlich als normbildend bezeichnen kann. Darunter fällt sowohl die normstiftende (begründende, intiierende, erhöhende, rechtfertigende) Leistung der heroischen Kunst wie auch die unübersehbare Rolle der lehrhaften Kunst in der Vermittlung, Verteilung, Erläuterung des von Generation zu Generation weiterzureichenden Wissens der alltäglichen Lebenspraxis" (p. 246).

<sup>35</sup> See Jauss's criticism of the empirical study conducted by Heinz Hillman in "Der Leser als Instanz einer neuen Geschichte der Literatur," Poetica: Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft, 7 (1975), pp. 329-34. On the problem of empirical studies, see also Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Konsequenzen der Rezeptionästhetik oder Literaturwissenschaft als Kommunikationssoziologie," Poetica, 7 (1975), pp. 406-7.

<sup>36</sup> "H. R. Jauß hat gegen Adorno die kommunikativen Funktionen der Kunst eingeklagt. Daß diese bei Adorno nicht vorkommen, hat ihren guten Grund: Probleme der Rezeption und der Kommunikation können sich im Zusammenhang der Kunst erst stellen, wenn der von Adorno konstruierte eindeutige Verweisungszusammenhang von Wirklichkeit, Kunstwerk und Utopie in Frage gestellt wird. Wo dagegen dieser Verweisungszusammenhang vorausgesetzt wird, erschöpfen sich Probleme der Rezeption und der Kommunikation im Problem der angemessenen Erfassung des Verweisungszusammenhangs selbst: was zählt, ist allein die genuine Erfahrung der Kunstwerke und deren philosophische Enträtselung."

<sup>37</sup> For example, in the Diacritics interview, Jauss agrees with the following formulation by Dieckmann: "If I understand you correctly, what you call the history of reception is still an essential part of our present-day interpretation: we must be conscious of the special way in which the work of art was received at a certain time and take this into account in our present-day interpretation" (Jauss Interview, p. 53).

## CHAPTER VI

### FORM AND ESSAY

In the previous chapter on reception we established that Adorno struggled to reconcile the need for a subject, necessary to criticize society and cultural phenomena, with his emphatic position that criticism must be objective. Moreover, throughout the present study we have addressed the equally difficult dilemma of how art, which is produced by human labor, can nonetheless indirectly mediate truth that can be considered objective. As we have seen, in the area of artistic production Adorno accomplished this goal by theorizing that social content enters art indirectly in the course of the artist's active encounter with artistic material. In this way, the mediation between society and art was seen to take place under the surface of the artist's conscious efforts: the artist's struggle with technical, formal problems entailed a concomitant but unconscious struggle with social antagonisms. We have also hinted that Adorno saw in immanent criticism the possibility to do for reception what his conception of material and technical problems did for artistic production, that is, to render critical activity objective by somehow distancing it from the subjective passions, drives, and controls of humans.

A major focus of this chapter will thus be to present how Adorno intended to subjugate reception to the objective qualities of the artwork. As we will see, the main tool Adorno counted on to insure objectivity in the act of criticism was form, specifically the "modest" form of the essay (or in the case of *Minima*

Moralia, the aphorism). After examining the theoretical characteristics of the essay that made the form so important to Adorno, we will look at two of Adorno's own critical essays to see how he utilizes the essay form to find consistently in quite diverse artistic works evidence to support many of the themes stressed in his philosophical aesthetics.

#### The Essay as Form of Understanding

In Aesthetic Theory Adorno states that only in the act of criticism do art and philosophy converge (AT, p. 131; AT, p. 137). The manner in which this convergence takes place, as we shall see, relies heavily on form; in addition, form is at the heart of how Adorno intended criticism and the discernment of truth to rise above the conscious activities of the critic. The form to which Adorno turned to serve such elaborate tasks was that of the essay, the attributes of which he described and praised in detail in his own essay entitled "Der Essay als Form" ("The Essay as Form") that opens his Noten zur Literatur (Notes on Literature). His remarks about the essay reveal, perhaps more lucidly than in Aesthetic Theory, how his preoccupation with form mirrors the concerns he had about art and truth; they also demonstrate how Adorno sought to overcome the problem of presenting ideas via language and concepts he mistrusts through a subject without allowing the result to become "subjective." Let us turn to his argument for the essay.

One important trait of the essay is its modesty. In this claim Adorno agrees with Lukács, whom he cites from the latter's essay "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," which introduced the book Soul and Form. "The essayist waves off his own proud hopes . . . --after all he can only offer explanations of the poems of others and at best explanations of his own concepts."<sup>1</sup> By modesty

Adorno means that the essay makes no absolute claims for itself. It promotes no system; it is fragmentary, nondogmatic, "the critical form par excellence."<sup>2</sup>

Already in this claim to modesty we can see an important reason for Adorno's choice of the essay as the most appropriate form of critical discourse. Since the essay only comes alive through its link to the artistic or cultural phenomena being criticized, it is less susceptible to identity thinking than the more pretentious forms that "apply" outside systems of thought to art. For this reason the truth of art--which as we have seen is the product of quite elaborate mediations--is less likely to be overwhelmed or obscured in the process of criticism. A further advantage of the essay over more dogmatic forms is that the essayist virtually disappears behind the form.

That such a disappearance is desirable of course stems from Adorno's consistent attempts to insulate the artwork (and its interpretation) from the perverting influence of humans. It is therefore not surprising that Adorno addresses in most of his formulations not how the essayist but rather how the essay proceeds, even to the point of saying, for example, how the essay "wants," "inquires," and even "thinks."<sup>3</sup> Such personifications of the essay are not simply stylistic tricks, for Adorno states emphatically that he intends the essayist to shrink behind the form of the essay. "The thinker actually does not think at all but rather makes himself the scene of intellectual [geistige] experience without simplifying it" (NL, p. 21, my translation).<sup>4</sup> In shifting the responsibility from the essayist to the essay, Adorno grants the essay a degree of autonomy that allows it to distance itself from other forms of thought but through form eliminates this thought's memory. "The essay chooses [intellectual experience (geistige Erfahrung)] as a model without simply imitating it as reflected form; it mediates [such

experience] through its own conceptual organization" (NL, p. 21, my translation).<sup>5</sup> What this means is that the essay is not an entirely unique manner of thinking, since it still draws on the conceptual apparatus of traditional thought. Through reorganization, however, the essay can play such concepts off against each other in order to reveal the gaps or breaks between the concepts and what is to be conveyed. As Adorno puts it, the essay "thinks in fragments [in Brüchen] just as reality is fragmented [brüchig] and finds its unity through the breaks, not in smoothing them over" (NL, p. 25, my translation).<sup>6</sup> In this manner, the essay proceeds "methodologically unmethodologically" (NL, p. 21, my translation).<sup>7</sup>

What the essay accomplishes for criticism and reception of art or cultural phenomena is an indirectness vis-à-vis the object in question that allows a different relationship than can be formed otherwise between the subject and object; more accurately, the essay is an indirect route, a detour, between the subject (the essayist) and the object (the artwork). But in Adorno's view, this detour at least allows the essay itself to enter into a direct and unmediated relationship with the art object not possible for the subject. Of course this new relationship is a product of yet another construct in Adorno's aesthetics, but Adorno takes this construct very seriously. Let us elaborate on these ideas by sketching out some of the more pertinent passages in Noten zur Literatur.

In reference to the detour of the essay, we can turn to a formula by Friedrich Schlegel: "Idea = crooked line."<sup>8</sup> Norbert Bolz decodes this equation as follows: "the essayistic representation of the imageless idea is, mindful of its linguistic boundaries, necessarily forced into detours; its way to truth is not a straight but a crooked line: the aesthetic picture [Gebilde] is not immediately interpretable."<sup>9</sup> The need to detour has to do with Adorno's conviction that to articulate art directly with concepts renders it inauthentic. The detour of the

essay allows this form to take on a self-sufficiency and autonomy similar to those of the artwork itself in its ability to make the elements of an object speak (NL, p. 11). As Bolz points out, the essay is conceptual, but not science; it is aesthetically autonomous, but not poetry (Bolz, p. 1). It cannot be the purpose of the essay as an autonomous form to interpret art. Instead, the essay experiences art and reflects on that experience without transgressing against the ban on images (Bilderverbot) by attempting to articulate the experience of art directly. The experience the essay provides is crucial in a world that has no ability to experience immediately, a world in which "every wound becomes an organ of feeling."<sup>10</sup> The wound represents negativity as understanding. As Lukács puts it: "For only as experience [Erlebnis] does the essayist need the form."<sup>11</sup>

However, Bolz points out that the ability of the essay to articulate experience is only apparent or, to take a phrase from Schlegel, a "transcendental deception," which means that the idea itself of artworks must be "allegorically pronounced."<sup>12</sup> This point comes as no surprise, for it corresponds to the necessary deceptive appearance (Schein) of artworks themselves. Just as in that case, where (Schein) was to be preserved in order to provide for truth in art, so it is that the deception embodied in the form of the essay is an integral part of its path to understanding or Erkenntnis. The hope is that through this deception the essayist can transcend his own thought via the essay, itself a product of this thought. To do this, the essayist must of course shrink behind the form he creates; he turns over to the essay the tasks he alone cannot realize. But what exactly separates the essay from that which the essayist himself could accomplish?

We have already mentioned that the essay promotes no system. This is because philosophical systems, as Schlegel complained about Descartes, are "deadly to spirit and life."<sup>13</sup> Adorno echoes this complaint in criticisms of Descartes's four rules of method in Discourse on Method.<sup>14</sup> The essay should respect the art object's wholeness and therefore not divide the difficulties into "as many parts . . . as may be required for its adequate solution," as Descartes postulates (p. 129). Adorno (and the essay form) also reject Descartes's rule "to arrange my thoughts in order, beginning with things the simplest and easiest to know, so that I may then ascend little by little, as it were step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex" (p. 129). As Gillian Rose explains, "Thinking for Adorno starts from the complex and is not separated into progressive stages."<sup>15</sup>

To avoid becoming a system, the essay refuses to define the concepts it is forced to appropriate and always views them critically, even to the point of criticizing the essayist's own prejudices. Concepts take on meaning only according to their relations to each other, not through a decreed definition from an outside authority. That the essay should resist forcing definitions onto concepts is tied to the ideas of both Nietzsche and Benjamin, who see the origin of language--and specifically the act of naming of things--as the origin of domination.<sup>16</sup> Thus the essay processes concepts "unconsciously," that is, the concepts are played off against each other so as to avoid imposing fixed definitions onto them.

The suspicion about language and concepts that causes Adorno to turn to the essay form for relief is linked to Adorno's rejection of communication. If language must be retained, it is not for the sake of its communicative properties; instead Adorno subscribes to the early German romantic notion of language as

the source of magic and revealing words.<sup>17</sup> As Bolz writes in his discussion of Adorno's essay on the romantic poet Eichendorff, "The romanticist hopes for salvation only from language, not from the communicative, alienated language, but from the 'magic word,' that is, from a language that does not suppress the objects through classification; instead the romanticist listens intently to the objects' own language and attunes himself to it" (Bolz, p. 73, my translation).<sup>18</sup>

Another manner in which the essay formally manifests its status as antisystem is through its fragmentariness. The fragment is the epitome of discontinuous thinking; Adorno thus looks to it to counter the identity and domination of philosophical or linguistic systems. The fragment also rejects closure or any sense that insights into the object have been exhausted. The fragmented essay must convey the sense that it could break off at any time (Bolz, p. 19). It must remain eternal.<sup>19</sup> Its discontinuous nature also rejects causality. Adorno writes for example that the essay lacks a specific standpoint and that all objects are equally near to its center (NL, p. 28).<sup>20</sup> The guiding principle of the essay is coordination, not subordination (Bolz, p. 25). It exists as negativity: it refuses to interpret, define, articulate, or close either the art object or the means about which it reflects by resorting to positive definition. This does not mean that to interpret the objectivity of the work can be equated with discovering the author's intention. Rather, the critical essay takes impulses from the spontaneous subjective fantasy of the essayist to lend the artwork a voice. But this voice is not the voice of intentionality, but rather the voice of the objective artwork. The critical essay is both the modestly documented experience of the artwork and its interpretation. "Nothing can be interpreted out that is not at the same time interpreted in" (NL, p. 11, my translation).<sup>21</sup>

By now we have described Adorno's conception of the essay enough to draw some conclusions about its role in mediation. As we have seen, Adorno ascribes to the essay many characteristics that it shares with the artwork. Based on these similarities the essay gains a close affinity to the artwork: the essay is produced when a subject strives to suspend its conscious identity drive, recedes behind form, and allows this form to dictate a freer relationship to language and concepts. The similarity of this process to artistic production is significant, for in this way form again provides (this time on the side of reception) the necessary distance from human influence. Through form two products are created--the artwork and the critical essay--that, because of similar negations of their origins, can enter into a relationship that borders on immediacy. "All levels of the mediated are immediate to the essay before it begins to reflect" (NL, p. 19, my translation).<sup>22</sup>

### Examples

What the above discussion of the essay reveals is that its appeal to Adorno has to do with its similarity to particular types of art the philosopher valued, particularly fragmented, noncommunicative art that employs language so as to uphold the theological ban on images (Bilderverbot) that we have discussed. To get a more specific impression of just what artists (and which aspects of these artists' work) Adorno considered to comply with the guidelines of his program or "antisystem," let us briefly examine some of Adorno's own essays or "notes" on literature.

Joseph von Eichendorff

Among the many essays in Noten zur Literatur is one on the poet Joseph von Eichendorff that exemplifies how some of the themes that are stressed in Adorno's major theoretical works recur in his critical essays directed toward specific artists. Let us sketch out some of these points.

The standard book on Eichendorff, of which Adorno is well aware, reads something like this: Eichendorff, a conservative and affirmative poet of the late German romantic period, is most influenced by his devout Catholicism (which typified the late German romantic movement) and his longing to return to the security of feudalism. For example, in his most famous novel, Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts (From the Life of a Good-for-Nothing), Eichendorff presents an indolent and good-natured protagonist who travels the countryside with no particular destination or goal in life, but for whom God always provides.

At first glance, then, Eichendorff seems to offer little for Adorno, whose demand for negativity would be better served by the likes of Kafka or Beckett. But Adorno sees more in Eichendorff than the standard book would lead us to expect. For example, Adorno argues emphatically that the affirmative tone of Eichendorff's poems and prose "are unquestionably related to the European world-pain [Weltschmerz]" (NL, p. 72, my translation)<sup>23</sup>; thus what happiness Eichendorff's work conveys must be seen as merely an answer to pain. Adorno for example writes of the courage involved in Eichendorff's decision to be lively and cheerful (munter) and sees in the line "beware, be awake and cheerful" already the Rilkean tone of "As if we still had happiness."<sup>24</sup>

In another of Eichendorff's verses Adorno highlights the implicit resignation residing beneath the superficial happiness.

Hinaus, o Mensch, weit in die Welt  
 Bangt dir das Herz in krankem Mut;  
 Nichts ist so trüb in Nacht gestellt,  
 Der Morgen leicht macht's wieder gut.

About these lines, Adorno writes: "The powerlessness [Ohnmacht] of such stanzas is not that of the restricted happiness, but rather that of futile adjuration [Beschwörung] and the expression of its futility" (NL, p. 73, my translation).<sup>25</sup> To support this interpretation Adorno adds that the word leicht 'easily' should really be read as the skeptically Viennese form of vielleicht 'perhaps'; thus the last line loses much of its optimism and instead reads "perhaps the morning will make things good again."

In Adorno's view, it is wrong to say that in his work Eichendorff conservatively glorifies the status quo. As the philosopher somewhat cryptically puts it, "Eichendorff glorifies what is but does not mean being [das Seiende]. He was not a poet of the homeland but one of homesickness in the sense of Novalis . . ." (NL, p. 73, my translation).<sup>26</sup> To continue his argument, Adorno also criticizes the contemporary meaning of the word "conservative." As he sees it, conservatism no longer means what it once did, especially in the area of poetry where it has changed the most. In contrast to the present pejorative meaning he gives to the word--an arbitrary praise of ties in an attempt to justify a bad establishment (Bestehende)--Adorno argues that at one time conservatism was characterized by the wish for "a very different [establishment] that could only be weighed against its opposite, the rising barbarism" (NL, p. 74, my translation).<sup>27</sup> Adorno continues:

That much of what makes up Eichendorff stems from his perspective of the deposed feudalist is so obvious that social criticism of it would be silly; but his sense of conservatism lay not only in the restoration of a sunken order, but also in resistance to the destructive tendency of the bourgeoisie itself. His superiority over all the reactionaries

who today reach out their hands to him proves true therein that he, like the great philosophy of his epoch, grasped the necessity<sup>28</sup> of the revolution that made him shudder. (NL, p. 74, my translation)

As we can see, Adorno has no trouble seeing in a "conservative" poet simultaneously a poet who consciously understood (begriff) the tensions of his era. But this is not the only area in which Adorno saw in Eichendorff a poet whose work confirmed Adorno's aesthetics of the negative dialectic. Eichendorff's brilliance and perceptiveness also extended to another favorite theme of Adorno's: the overcoming of domination in general and particularly the suspension of the dominating subject that Eichendorff accomplishes through his use of language.

Adorno sees such a suspension of subject, among other places, in Eichendorff's "Übern Garten durch die Lüfte," one of "the most passionate love poems in the German language" (NL, p. 77, my translation).<sup>29</sup> Of interest to him in this poem is that the "she" of the poem never appears, nor does the poet speak of himself. "Audible is only the jubilation: 'She is Yours, she is yours!'" (NL, p. 77, my translation).<sup>30</sup> To Adorno, this is an exemplary case where a "ban on images" (Bilderverbot) with respect to "names and fulfillment" is operative (NL, p. 77).<sup>31</sup> By refusing to make the images of his characters concrete, Eichendorff shows his unwillingness to betray the idea of the fulfillment that only the negative image promises: "any determinate beautiful would already be treason against the idea of boundless fulfillment" (NL, p. 77, my translation).<sup>32</sup> Or as Adorno later puts it, "None of Eichendorff's images is only that which it is, and none can be tied to its own concept" (NL, p. 82, my translation).<sup>33</sup> Adorno also sees the suspension of the subject expressed in one of Eichendorff's favorite words, (chaotic) confusion (wirr): "it announces the suspension of the I, the abandonment of a chaos crowding in from the outside" (NL, p. 79, my

translation).<sup>34</sup> Adorno sees this suspension of the I as evidence that Eichendorff's poetry is not "subjective" at all and draws on this observation to attack the "subjectivist" label that is generally affixed to romantic poetry. Eichendorff's poetry "raises silent objection to the poetic subject by abandoning the impulse of language" (NL, p. 79, my translation).<sup>35</sup> The confusion and disembodiment of the poetic subject Adorno illustrates in the opening lines of one of Eichendorff's poems: "I hear the brooks rushing / In the forest fro and to / In the forest in the rushing / I know not where I am" (NL, p. 79, my translation).<sup>36</sup> Adorno emphasizes that the I is disoriented because it has lost itself in that which it whisperingly describes. The metaphor of the brooks rushing "fro and to" Adorno calls "ingeniously false, for the movement of brooks is single-mindedly straight [einsinnig], but the fro and to transmits the disturbance of what the sounds say to the I who listens without localizing them" (NL, p. 79).<sup>37</sup>

To extend his argument about the role of language in suspending the subject, Adorno revives an insight of the mostly forgotten German aesthetician Theodor Meyer, who in his 1901 book Das Stilgesetz der Poesie postulated that certain sensual images actually cannot be created with language, and that the images poets convey are actually quite different from the images of reality residing in one's imagination. Therefore, language cannot be viewed as the vehicle, but rather the means of presentation (Darstellungsmittel) of poetry (NL, p. 82).<sup>38</sup> This conception of language's function in poetry is important to Adorno because it is consistent with his notion that artworks reflect not reality but rather natural beauty in itself (das Naturschöne an sich).<sup>39</sup> This too he finds illustrated in Eichendorff's work, in which poetic language as means of

presentation is "autonomous" and brings about the "self-extinguishment of the subject" (NL, p. 83, my translation).<sup>40</sup>

As an example of the process through which the subject suspends itself by means of language, Adorno cites the lines "Und so muß ich, wie im Strome dort die Welle, / Ungehört verrauschen an des Frühlings Schwelle" (NL, p. 83).<sup>41</sup>

Adorno reads in these lines a transformation of the flesh into the word that occurs when the subject "passes away" on spring's threshold.<sup>42</sup> The subject suspends itself through a transformation into the sound of rushing (Rauschen). It is as if the subject is so engrossed in the sound of the water that it abandons identity to become part of the waves. Adorno equates this transformation with the act whereby the subject itself becomes language, since "Rauschen," Adorno claims, is related more to language than to sound. Still, this poetic language, because of its affinity with pure sound, is less fixed and dominating than everyday language. And in Adorno's view, this alternate concept of language is necessary to approach the expression of the inexpressible.

About another occurrence of "Rauschen" in Eichendorff's poetry, Adorno writes: "[Poetry] imitates rushing and lonely nature; it articulates an alienation that no thought but only pure sound can bridge" (NL, p. 83, my translation).<sup>43</sup> This is an important point for Adorno's conception of artistic language and its relation to music. Since language that serves a communicative function is primarily denotative (at least compared to what Adorno would wish from language), it can only be an ally of reification. What poetry approaches is an overcoming of language's reified, denotative traits through undercutting meaning and communication. It accomplishes this by replacing denotative language with sounds that are less laden with fixed meanings and therefore less apt to dominate objects. Adorno sees much of Eichendorff's worth in his effort to

accomplish a "reconciliation with the objects through language" (NL, p. 84, my translation)<sup>44</sup> at a time (the end of the Romantic period) when the task was difficult due to the worn out and reified language Eichendorff had at his disposal. Interestingly, Adorno writes that language only transcends to music through the power of such reconciliation.<sup>45</sup> To close the discussion of Adorno's essay on Eichendorff, let us briefly examine some of Adorno's revealing diction, much as Adorno examined the language of Eichendorff.

One point that stands out in Adorno's formulations is his insistence on bringing out what Eichendorff effects "unconsciously," which is consistent with the way Adorno described artistic production.<sup>46</sup> For example, Adorno writes that Eichendorff's unfettered romanticism leads "unconsciously" to the threshold of modernism (NL, p. 78).<sup>47</sup> Eichendorff also has a "secret share" in the under-current that leads from Sturm und Drang and the young Goethe through Büchner and some of Hauptmann up to Wedekind, Expressionism, and Brecht (NL, p. 79).<sup>48</sup> In a particular Eichendorff poem, Adorno sees an "entirely unspoken and therefore all the more emphatic allegory" (NL, p. 81, my translation).<sup>49</sup>

The point has been made. What is great about Eichendorff is really what he shares with other great poets. He responds to the pain of the world (Weltschmerz), the domination of concepts, the reification of language, with poetry and prose that respects the Bilderverbot, upholds negativity, strives for infinity, undercuts subjectivity, and demands of the reader a "strenuous passivity" (NL, p. 71),<sup>50</sup> i.e., a reader who can suppress his identity drive. In finding these elements in Eichendorff, Adorno does his part toward rewriting that standard book on Eichendorff and declares his poetry in a dialectical twist "truly anti-conservative," whose modernism is apparent in his "renunciation of domination, especially the domination of the own ego over the soul" (NL, p. 78).<sup>51</sup>

Samuel Beckett

If Eichendorff seemed an unlikely candidate for Adorno's attention, Beckett's work stands almost alone in its direct affinity with the major themes in Adorno's aesthetics. It is thus not surprising that Adorno intended to dedicate his Aesthetic Theory to Beckett. Because Beckett so effectively represents for Adorno an exemplary model of an artist within the stricken modern world, a brief look at some of Adorno's statements on Beckett is warranted.

The first impression one is likely to have upon completing Adorno's essay on Beckett in Noten zur Literatur or the philosopher's fragmentary references to Beckett in Aesthetic Theory may be one of disappointment, a disappointment, however, that can be explained. Adorno, as we saw in his essay on Eichendorff, is a master at interpreting art against the grain, seeing what to most is obscured; this ability is also what Adorno admired greatly in Benjamin. But what is Adorno to make of Beckett? Since Beckett so effectively illustrates the sense of the senselessness that ultimately emerges from the blinded, administered world that tormented Adorno, there actually remains little that Adorno can surprisingly twist around through interpretation.<sup>52</sup> If Beckett and Adorno are both describing the same condition in different ways--Beckett artistically, Adorno theoretically--then it is perhaps no wonder that Adorno has little to add.<sup>53</sup> The striking images that serve Adorno so well in other essays and aphorisms lose some of their power when referring to Beckett. For these reasons, a rather brief examination of Adorno's remarks on Beckett seems sufficient.

One major thesis of Adorno's essay "Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen" ("An Attempt to Understand the Endgame") is to point out Beckett's superiority over the Parisian existentialism to which Beckett is superficially similar. After

listing some of these similarities, Adorno not surprisingly zeros in on questions of form and charges that existentialists such as Sartre write in a form that is "to a certain extent traditionalistic, by no means reckless, but instead concerned with effect" (NL, p. 281, my translation).<sup>54</sup> Beckett, however, alters what existentialism expresses by transforming its impulses formally in using the most advanced artistic means, those of Joyce and Kafka. Through this transformation absurdity ceases to be something that is diluted to an idea in order to illustrate the condition of existence. Instead, "the poetic process turns itself over to [absurdity] unintentionally. [Absurdity] is separated from that generality of the lesson which tied existentialism with the Western pathos of the general and the remaining: the doctrine of the insolubility of individual existing" (NL, p. 281, my translation).<sup>55</sup>

Merely in his written formulations it is easy to detect the theoretical positions from which Adorno attacks existentialism. Of course any "doctrine" is incompatible with Adorno's "anti-system," especially one that preaches an autonomous individual existence; Adorno would counter this notion by pointing to the liquidation of the individual at the hands of the culture industry. What is particularly interesting in Adorno's remarks is that Beckett is absolved, based on formal criteria, of the sins of existentialism. That Adorno also at this juncture includes his obligatory observation about unintentionality confirms what we have outlined theoretically in earlier chapters: Beckett's art can be truthful and valuable because he is engrossed in considerations of form which allow him to avoid intentionality.

Adorno's condemnation of existentialism stems from his view of the modern world as a "permanent catastrophe," a phrase he repeats several times in his essay. Under such conditions existentialism is obsolete. As Adorno puts it, the

norm of existential philosophy--that humans should be themselves because they can no longer be anything else--is countered by the antithetical position of the Endgame that precisely this "self" is no longer a self but the apelike imitation of a non-existent (NL, p. 312).<sup>56</sup> Beckett's characters reveal the signs of a damaged world. As Adorno describes:

Beckett's figures conduct themselves in just as primitive-behavioristic a manner as would correspond to the conditions after the catastrophe which has mutilated them to such an extent that they cannot react any differently; flies that twitch after the swatter has half squashed them. (NL, p. 293, my translation)<sup>57</sup>

The old testament phrase "you shall turn to dust" is translated into "you shall turn to muck" (NL, p. 321).<sup>58</sup> The consolation of the world--that things could be worse--becomes a damning condemnation in Beckett's world between life and death (NL, p. 311).<sup>59</sup> "Beckett's trash cans are emblems of the culture that was rebuilt after Auschwitz" (NL, p. 311, my translation).<sup>60</sup> The condition of the world in Beckett, as Adorno remarks in Aesthetic Theory, is directly related to the liquidation of the subject that has taken place: "By slaying the subject, reality itself becomes lifeless" (AT, p. 45).<sup>61</sup>

But what are we to make of this world? What is the sense of it? Remaining true to his commitment to negativity, Adorno emphatically declares that to understand the Endgame "can mean nothing other than to understand its unintelligibility (Unverständlichkeit), to reconstruct concretely its sense inter-relationship (Sinnzusammenhang), namely that it has none" (NL, p. 283, my translation).<sup>62</sup> "Meaninglessness becomes the only meaning" (NL, p. 305, my translation).<sup>63</sup>

Hamm: We're not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something?

Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (Brief laugh.) Ah that's a good one!<sup>64</sup>

Of course to recognize meaninglessness is meaningful. As Adorno puts it in Aesthetic Theory, "Beckett's plays are absurd not for their absence of meaning--if they had no meaning they would be irrelevant rather than absurd--but because they put meaning on the agenda, tracing its history" (AT, p. 220).<sup>65</sup>

In the face of such meaninglessness all hopes are dashed. "[Beckett] shrugs his shoulders about the possibility of philosophy today, of theory at all" (NL, p. 284, my translation).<sup>66</sup> As Adorno laments, "those were still the good times when a critique of the political economy of this society could be written that discussed society in terms of its own rational assumptions" (NL, p. 284, my translation).<sup>67</sup>

Hamm: Nature has forgotten us.

Clov: There's no more nature.<sup>68</sup>

These lines are symptomatic of "the phase of the complete reification of the world that leaves nothing more remaining that was not made by men" (NL, p. 285, my translation).<sup>69</sup> "Ontology comes home as the pathological convalescence of false life. Life is represented as the state of negative eternity" (NL, p. 287, my translation).<sup>70</sup> "Because there was no other life than the false one, the catalog of life's defects becomes the counterpart of ontology" (NL, p. 300).<sup>71</sup> Nothing is left, not even humor. The things about which one laughs in Beckett are silly and ridiculous. "Even the jokes of the damaged are damaged" (NL, p. 301, my translation).<sup>72</sup>

In addition to stacking futile images upon images, Adorno also reserves space in his Beckett essay to discuss language. In this regard Adorno points to

a "ban on language" (Sprachverbot) in Beckett that is similar to the "ban on images" (Bilderverbot) which we discussed in previous chapters and which makes negativity necessary.<sup>73</sup> For example, Adorno cites a passage in Endgame where Hamm asks what one can still talk about as an example of such a "ban on language"<sup>74</sup> and states that such a ban demonstrates how Beckett's negativity spares him from the aporia of expressionistic drama:

that language, even where it tendentiously diminishes itself to sound, cannot shake off its semantic element, cannot become pure mimesis or gesture, approximately like forms of painting that despite their emancipation from objectivity [Gegenständlichkeit] cannot completely do away with their similarity to the objectified [Ähnlichkeit mit Gegenständlichem]. (NL, p. 305, my translation).<sup>75</sup>

Therefore Beckett does not attempt to break down language into mere sound. In this regard Endgame differs from Finnegans Wake: "Instead of trying to liquidate the discursive element of language through pure sound [as in Finnegans Wake], Beckett transforms it into an instrument of its own absurdity according to the ritual of clowns whose babbling becomes nonsense because it is presented as sense" (NL, p. 306, my translation).<sup>76</sup> Adorno points to this as "the objective decomposition/decay of language [Sprachzerfall]" (NL, p. 306, my translation)<sup>77</sup> and sees in Beckett a technique analogous to the detestable party game in which someone in secret meticulously records every nonsensical word spoken at a party and then plays the tape back to humiliate the guests. Beckett takes the language of the commercialized world and negates it by restructuring it into poetic language. The ubiquitous clichés of communicative language give notice that communication is no longer possible; by continuing to hold to the rules of syntax, defined concepts, and logic in a world of nonsense, language only makes its absurdity more obvious. "The absurdity of all speaking does not

stand in opposition to realism; it is developed from realism" (NL, p. 307, my translation).<sup>78</sup>

Beckett's work thus well illustrates the conditions which can give rise to Adorno's philosophical aesthetics. As we mentioned at the opening of this section, however, it is perhaps due to the affinity between the work of the artist and the philosopher that the latter appears hard pressed to top the already depressing images of the former. Adorno's program can certainly be derived from the model of Beckett, but one may question whether Adorno's remarks really bring anything new to light about Beckett. Such a demand, however, does not do Adorno's criticism justice, since his literary criticism is not intended merely to elucidate the artwork but rather to appropriate the artwork in an effort to elucidate the world. Because such an effort seems quite abstract when described in a theoretical work such as Aesthetic Theory, the essay on the Endgame perhaps makes more clear Adorno's contention that aesthetic criticism and philosophy are inextricably linked.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Der Essayist winkt den eigenen, stolzen Hoffnungen. . . ab--es sind ja nur Erklärungen der Gedichte anderer, die er bieten kann und bestenfalls die der eigenen Begriffe," Georg Lukács, Die Seele und die Formen/Essays (Neuwied and Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1971), p. 19, my translation (this edition gives the pagination of the 1911 first edition); cited in Theodor W. Adorno, Noten zur Literatur, p. 17. Page numbers from subsequent citations from this volume will be given in the body of the text and abbreviated NL.

<sup>2</sup> "die kritische Form par excellence" (my translation), Theodor W. Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," in Noten zur Literatur, p. 27. The affinities here to the early German romanticists are quite manifest. They too hailed fragments for their symbolic ties to infinity. The early romantics also shared Adorno's pronounced pessimism about the present. To list all the similarities between Adorno and the thought of early German romanticists (whose movement was more strongly tied to philosophy than was English romanticism) would extend beyond the scope of this study. For information on this connection--and especially the link between Adorno and the romanticists Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis--see Norbert W. Bolz, Geschichtsphilosophie des Ästhetischen: Hermeneutische Rekonstruktion der "Noten zur Literatur Th. W. Adornos" (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> "But the essay does not want to seek out and distill the eternal in the fleeting; it wants rather to eternalize the fleeting" (NL, p. 18, my translation). ["Der Essay aber will nicht das Ewige im Vergänglichen aufsuchen und abdestillieren, sondern eher das Vergängliche verewigen" (NL, p. 18).] "[The essay] does not inquire into primal events. . ." (NL, p. 19, my translation). "[[Der Essay] fragt nach keiner Urgegebenheit. . ." (NL, p. 19).] "[The essay thinks together in freedom what finds itself together in the freely chosen object" (NL, p. 19, my translation). ["In Freiheit denkt [der Essay] zusammen, was sich zusammenfindet in dem frei gewählten Gegenstand" (NL, p. 19).]

<sup>4</sup> "Eigentlich denkt der Denkende gar nicht, sondern macht sich zum Schauplatz geistiger Erfahrung, ohne sie aufzudröseln" (NL, p. 21).

<sup>5</sup> "Der Essay aber wählt [geistige Erfahrung] als Vorbild, ohne sie, als reflektierte Form, einfach nachzuahmen" (NL, p. 21).

<sup>6</sup> "[Der Essay] denkt in Brüchen, so wie die Realität brüchig ist, und findet seine Einheit durch die Brüche hindurch, nicht indem er sie glättet" (NL, p. 25).

<sup>7</sup> "methodisch unmethodisch" (NL, p. 21).

<sup>8</sup> "Idee = krumme Linie," Friedrich Schlegel, Philosophische Lehrjahre 1796-1806, nebst philosophischen Manuskripten aus den Jahren 1796-1823, erster Teil, Vol. XVIII of Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, ed. Ernst Behler (München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1963), p. 400.

<sup>9</sup> "die essayistische Darstellung der bildlosen Idee wird, eingedenk ihrer sprachlichen Grenzen, notwendig auf Umwege gezwungen; ihr Weg zur Wahrheit ist nicht der gerade, das ästhetische Gebilde unmittelbar interpretierende, sondern eine krumme Linie" (Bolz, p. 3, my translation).

<sup>10</sup> "Jede Wunde wird zum Organ des Gefühls" (Schlegel XVIII, p. 183, my translation).

<sup>11</sup> "Denn nur als Erlebnis braucht der Essayist die Form" (Lukács, p. 17, my translation).

<sup>12</sup> "Es giebt eine transcend.[entale] Täuschung. Wie in der Hier[archie] nur allegorisch gesprochen werden kann, so muß auch sie selbst allegor.[isch] ausgesprochen werden" (Schlegel, XVIII, p. 407).

<sup>13</sup> About Descartes's natural philosophy, Schlegel writes: "Descartes's natural philosophy is to be sure his own invention but it certainly, because it is in the highest degree mechanical, tends toward materialism. Through the elimination of the organic all spiritual [geistige] powers are exiled from nature: what can thus be more materialistic, more deadly to spirit and life, than when one derives everything from whirling (particles) and mathematical figures, like the ancestors from atoms" (my translation). ["Descartes' Naturphilosophie ist wohl seine eigene Erfindung, neigt sich aber, weil sie im höchsten Grade mechanisch ist, durchaus zum Materialismus. Mit Hinwegräumung des Organischen werden auch alle geistigen Kräfte aus der Natur verbannt; was kann also mehr materialistisch, mehr Geist und Leben tödend sein, als wenn man, wie die Alten aus Atomen, alles aus Wirbeln und mathematischen Figuren herleitet." Friedrich Schlegel, Philosophische Vorlesungen 1800-1807, erster Teil, Vol. XII of Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, ed. Ernst Behler (München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1964), p. 264.]

<sup>14</sup> René Descartes, Discourse on Method, in Descartes' Philosophical Writings, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1952), pp. 115-164; following page numbers are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>15</sup> Rose, p. 15; Adorno also rejects Descartes's fourth rule "everywhere to make such complete enumerations and comprehensive overviews that I would be certain not to leave anything out" (Descartes, p. 49, my translation from the German). Rose accurately recites Adorno's position on this rule too: "Adorno starts from the assumption of a split and antagonistic reality which cannot be

represented by any system which makes its goals unity and simplicity or clarity" (Rose, p. 15).

<sup>16</sup> As Nietzsche writes, "The right of the master to give names goes so far that one should allow oneself to consider the origin of language itself as the manifestation of the power of those who dominate: they say 'that is that and that'; they sign and seal every imaginable object and event with a sound and thereby take it as it were into possession" (my translation). ["Das Herrenrecht, Namen zu geben, geht so weit, daß man sich erlauben sollte, den Ursprung der Sprache selbst als Machtäußerung der Herrschenden zu fassen: sie sagen 'das ist das und das', sie siegeln jegliches Ding und Geschehen mit einem Laute ab und nehmen es dadurch gleichsam in Besitz," Friedrich Nietzsche, Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift, in Vol. II of Werke in drei Bänden, ed. Karl Schlechta (München: Carl Hanser, 1966), p. 773.]

<sup>17</sup> The connection between Adorno and the early German romantic period should not be construed as an assertion that Adorno was a romantic in the sense of the English romantic tradition. The early German romantic period of Jena, directly linked to the philosophy of the Schlegel brothers and others, was greatly preoccupied with the pain of an imperfect and restricted earthly existence. These romantics also resisted the advances of the Enlightenment that seemingly sought to analyze and explain away the very mysteries of the spirit in which romanticists sought sanctuary. To escape the glaring light of the Enlightenment, romantic poets such as Novalis sang their praises to the final vestiges of mystery such as the darkness of the night. They sought out darkness and looked to havens distant from the surface of the Earth (such as in mountains or below the ground, which made mountain climbers and miners heroes) or in exotic far-away lands to provide the impulses of resistance to positivistic attempts to limit the spirit through classification.

These activities also extended to an altered view of language. Language's magical power that lay below the surface of communication was hailed as a source of experience in its unintelligibility (here one could think of the beautiful book the protagonist of Novalis's Heinrich von Ofterdingen finds in a mine; although it is written in an exotic foreign language he cannot understand, he is spellbound by the book's beauty). Such common concerns between Adorno and the early German romanticists make the parallels Bolz draws between them both interesting and plausible.

<sup>18</sup> "Rettung erhofft sich der Romantiker nur von der Sprache, nicht der kommunikativen, entfremdeten, sondern vom 'Zauberwort', d.h. einer Sprache, die die Dinge nicht klassifizierend unterdrückt, sondern deren eigener Sprache nachhört und ihr sich anverwandelt" (Bolz, p. 73).

<sup>19</sup> The association of the fragment with eternity is another remnant of the early German romantic poets who theorized that the literary fragment best represented the attempts of mortals to resist closure. In opposition to the German classicists, who stressed the balanced harmony and moderation of a

literary work of art that reaches a definite ending point of closure, the romanticists purposely left their works in fragments as a reaction against closure. Because the fragmented story or poem never ends, it was thought to be eternal.

20 "[The essay's] freedom in the choice of objects, its sovereignty in relation to all priorities of fact or theory it owes to the fact that to it all objects are as it were equally near to the center, to the principle that bewitches them all" (NL, p. 28, my translation). ["Seine Freiheit in der Wahl der Gegenstände, seine Souveränität gegenüber allen Prioritäten von Faktum oder Theorie verdankt er dem, daß ihm gewissermaßen alle Objekte gleich nah zum Zentrum sind: zu dem Prinzip, das alle verhext" (NL, p. 28).]

21 "Nichts läßt sich herausinterpretieren, was nicht zugleich hineininterpretiert wäre" (NL, p. 11).

22 "Alle Stufen des Vermittelten sind dem Essay unmittelbar, ehe er zu reflektieren sich anschickt" (NL, p. 19).

23 "Aber fraglos sind [jene Gedichte und Prosasätze] doch verwandt mit dem europäischen Weltschmerz" (NL, p. 72)..

24 "Hüte dich, sei wach und munter"; "Als ob wir noch Fröhlichkeit hätten" (NL, p. 72, both English translations are mine).

25 "Die Ohnmacht solcher Strophen ist nicht die des beschränkten Glücks, sondern der vergeblichen Beschwörung, und der Ausdruck ihrer Vergeblichkeit. . ." (NL, p. 73).

26 "Eichendorff verherrlicht was ist und meint doch nicht das Seiende. Er war kein Dichter der Heimat sondern der des Heimwehs, im Sinne des Novalismus. . ." (NL, p. 73).

27 "ein sehr anderes, das erst an seinem Gegensatz, der hereinbrechenden Barbarei, ganz sich wägen läßt" (NL, p. 74).

28 "Wieviel an Eichendorff aus der Perspektive des deposedierten Feudalen stammt, ist so offenbar, daß gesellschaftliche Kritik daran albern wäre; in seinem Sinne aber lag nicht nur die Restauration der entsunkenen Ordnung, sondern auch der Widerstand gegen die destruktive Tendenz des Bürgerlichen selber. Seine Überlegenheit über alle Reaktionäre, die heute die Hand nach ihm ausstrecken, bewährt sich daran, daß er, wie die große Philosophie seiner Epoche, die Notwendigkeit der Revolution begriff, vor der ihn schauderte" (NL, p. 74).

<sup>29</sup> "ein[s] der passioniertesten Liebesgedichte der deutschen Sprache" (NL, p. 77).

<sup>30</sup> "Laut wird einzig der Jubel: 'Sie ist Deine, sie ist dein!'" (NL, p. 77).

<sup>31</sup> "Über Namen und Erfüllung ist ein Bilderverbot ergangen" (NL, p. 77).

<sup>32</sup> "eine jegliche bestimmte Schöne wäre schon Verrat an der Idee schrankenloser Erfüllung" (NL, p. 77).

<sup>33</sup> "Keines der Eichendorffschen Bilder ist nur das, was es ist, und keines läßt sich doch auf seinen Begriff bringen" (NL, p. 82).

<sup>34</sup> "es meldet die Suspension des Ichs, seine Preisgabe an ein chaotisch Andrängendes an" (NL, p. 79).

<sup>35</sup> "[Eichendorffs Lyrik] erhebt, als Preisgabe an die Impulse der Sprache, stummen Einspruch gegen das dichterische Subjekt" (NL, p. 79).

<sup>36</sup> "Ich hör die Bächlein rauschen / Im Walde her und hin / Im Walde in dem Rauschen / Ich weiß nicht, wo ich bin" (NL, p. 79).

<sup>37</sup> "so weiß diese Lyrik überhaupt nie, wo ich bin, weil das Ich sich vergeudeut an das, wovon es flüstert. Genial falsch ist die Metapher von den Bächlein, die 'her und hin' rauschen, denn die Bewegung der Bäche ist einsinnig, aber das Her und Hin gibt das Verstörte dessen wieder, was die Laute dem Ich sagen, das lauscht, anstatt sie zu lokalisieren" (NL, p. 79).

<sup>38</sup> "Dann wäre die Sprache nicht das Vehikel, sondern das Darstellungs-  
mittel der Poesie" (NL, p. 82).

<sup>39</sup> For more on this, see "The Beauty of Nature and the Beauty of Art" in Chapter III.

<sup>40</sup> "Die 'Sprache als Darstellungsmittel der Poesie', als ein Autonomes, ist seine Wünschelrute. Ihr dient die Selbstauslöschung des Subjekts" (NL, p. 83).

<sup>41</sup> "And so I must, like the waves there in the stream, / Unperceptively pass away on the threshold of spring" (NL, p. 83, my translation).

<sup>42</sup> To follow Adorno's argument here, a gloss on the words "Rauschen" and "verrauschen" may be helpful. Rauschen can mean the rushing sound flowing water makes; "verrauschen" means to pass away, but it retains a sense of a rushing sound. Thus Adorno's claim that the subject loses itself into sound is not a farfetched reading.

<sup>43</sup> "[Dichtung] ahmt Rauschen und einsame Natur nach. Damit drückt sie eine Entfremdung aus, die kein Gedanke sondern nur noch der reine Laut überbrückt" (NL, p. 83).

<sup>44</sup> "Versöhnung mit den Dingen durch die Sprache" (NL, p. 84).

<sup>45</sup> "Zur Musik transzendent [Sprache] erst kraft jener Versöhnung" (NL, p. 31).

<sup>46</sup> On the "unconscious" aspects of artistic production, see Chapter IV.

<sup>47</sup> "Eichendorffs entfesselte Romantik führt bewußtlos zur Schwelle der Moderne" (NL, p. 78).

<sup>48</sup> "An diesem deutschen Unterstrom, wie er vom Sturm und Drang und vom jungen Goethe über Büchner und manches von Hauptmann bis zu Wiedekind, dem Expressionismus und Brecht treibt, hat Eichendorff insgeheim Anteil" (NL, p. 79).

<sup>49</sup> "ganz unausgesprochene und darum um so nachdrücklichere Allegorie" (NL, p. 81).

<sup>50</sup> "angestrengte Passivität" (NL, p. 71)

<sup>51</sup> "wahrhaft antikonservativ: Absage ans Herrschaftliche, an die Herrschaft zumal des eigenen Ichs über die Seele" (NL, p. 78).

<sup>52</sup> I think this is evident in a book by W. Martin Lüdke, Anmerkungen zu einer "Logik des Zerfalls": Adorno--Beckett (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1981). What Lüdke sets out to do appears plausible and interesting: He offers a general presentation of Adorno's aesthetics and reserves the last thirty pages of the book not to "apply" the theory to Beckett but to show how Beckett can serve as a model from which Adorno's theory can be derived. Of these thirty pages, however, the majority of them are dedicated to the "material" (citations from Beckett) and other critics remarks about Beckett (especially a great deal from Wolfgang Iser); Adorno somehow gets lost and is only really brought back into the discussion on the final page of the book.

<sup>53</sup> In a harshly critical article, Ulf Schramm, "Kritik der Theorie vom 'Kunstwerk als Negation': Beobachtungen an Beckett's 'Endspiel' und an Bildern von Vasarely und Fontana," Philosophisches Jahrbuch, 76, No. 2 (1968/69), 349-375, argues that what Adorno does have to say is based on isolated lines from Beckett that Adorno rips out of context in order to come up with a pretext for his own views of the world. Among the several examples Schramm lists (p. 361) is one passage where a translation may have caused a problem: Clov looks outside and declares that everything is "Corpse" (p. 25). French edition "Mortibus." Fin de partie (Paris: Minuit, 1957), p. 46. In the German version the word used is "Kaputt," Fünf Spiele, trans. Elmar Tophoven (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1969), p. 22. About this remark, Adorno writes "That all people are dead is secretly smuggled in" (NL, p. 285, my translation). [Daß alle Menschen tot seien, ist unter der Hand eingeschmuggelt" (NL, p. 285). To Schramm, the leap from "Kaputt" to death is unjustified; however, if Adorno's statement is based on the English "Corpse" or the word Mortibus in the French edition, the interpretation seems plausible. Despite this oversight of Schramm's, his point is well taken in some of his other examples, such as the passage where the waves do not move and gray dominates instead of the sun, about which Adorno writes: "History is left out because it has dried out the power of consciousness to think history, the power of remembrance" (NL, p. 288, my translation). ["Geschichte wird ausgespart, weil sie die Kraft des Bewußtseins ausgetrocknet hat, Geschichte zu denken, die Kraft zur Erinnerung" (NL, p. 288).] In Schramm's opinion, Adorno jumps on key words in Beckett in order to vent his views with such certainty that Beckett's text gets lost. As we mentioned earlier in Chapter IV, such Adornian leaps often frustrate critics who find such statements incompatible with Adorno's equally forceful observations that the critic must subordinate himself to objectivity of the artwork by utilizing "modest" forms.

<sup>54</sup> "Aber die Form . . . bei Sartre . . . [ist] einigermaßen traditionalistisch, keineswegs waghalsig, sondern auf Wirkung bedacht" (NL, p. 281).

<sup>55</sup> "Das dichterische Verfahren überläßt sich [Absurdität] intentionslos. Sie wird jener Allgemeinheit der Lehre entäußert, die sie im Existentialismus, der Doktrin von der Unauflöslichkeit des einzelnen Daseienden, gleichwohl mit dem abendländischen Pathos des Allgemeinen und Bleibenden verband" (NL, p. 281).

<sup>56</sup> This paraphrase is derived from the following quote: "Zur Norm der Existentialphilosophie, die Menschen sollten, weil sie schon gar nichts anderes mehr sein können, sie selber sein, setzt das Endspiel die Antithese, daß genau dies Selbst nicht das Selbst sondern die äffische Nachahmung eines nicht Existenten sei" (NL, p. 312).

<sup>57</sup> "Becketts Figuren benehmen sich so primitiv-behavioristisch, wie es den Umständen nach der Katastrophe entspräche, und diese hat sie derart verstümmelt, daß sie anders gar nicht reagieren können; Fliegen, die zucken, nachdem die Klatsche sie schon halb zerquetscht hat" (NL, p. 293).

58 "Wohl wird das alttestamentarische Zu Staub sollst du werden übersetzt in: Dreck" (NL, p. 321).

59 "der Allerweltstrost, es könne immer noch schlimmer kommen, wird zum Verdammungsurteil" (NL, p. 311).

60 "Becketts Mülleimer sind Embleme der nach Auschwitz wiederaufgebauten Kultur" (NL, p. 311).

61 "indem [Realität] das Subjekt erschlägt, wird sie selbst totenhaft" (AT, p. 53).

62 "[Endspiel] verstehen kann nichts anderes heißen, als seine Unverständlichkeit verstehen, konkret den Sinnzusammenhang dessen nachkonstruieren, daß es keinen hat" (NL, p. 283).

63 "Das nichts Bedeuten wird zur einzigen Bedeutung" (NL, p. 305).

64 Samuel Beckett, Endgame (London: Faber, 1958), p. 27; Adorno also quotes this passage in NL, p. 305.

65 "Becketts Stücke sind absurd nicht durch Abwesenheit jeglichen Sinnes--dann wären sie irrelevant--sondern als Verhandlung über ihn. Sie rollen seine Geschichte auf" (AT, p. 230).

66 "[Beckett] zuckt die Achseln über die Möglichkeit von Philosophie heute, von Theorie überhaupt" (NL, p. 284).

67 "das waren noch gute Zeiten, als eine Kritik der politischen Ökonomie dieser Gesellschaft geschrieben werden konnte, die sie bei ihrer eigenen ratio nahm" (NL, p. 284).

68 Beckett, p. 16.

69 "Ununterscheidbar die Phase der vollendeten Verdinglichung der Welt, die nichts mehr übrig läßt, was nicht von Menschen gemacht wäre" (NL, p. 285).

70 "Ontologie kommt nach Hause als Pathogenese des falschen Lebens. Dargestellt wird es als Stand negativer Ewigkeit" (NL, p. 287).

<sup>71</sup> "Weil aber kein anderes Leben war als das falsche, wird der Katalog seiner Defekte zum Widerspiel der Ontologie" (NL, p. 300).

<sup>72</sup> "Noch die Witze der Beschädigten sind beschädigt" (NL, p. 301).

<sup>73</sup> Adorno elaborates on this notion of a ban on speech in Aesthetic Theory: "Aesthetic transcendence and disenchantment achieve unison in the speechlessness that characterizes Beckett's work. Because a language without signification is a language without speech, it has such a great affinity with muteness. The element most akin to transcendence is expression, and perhaps every expression is somehow a falling silent, just as in modern music expression is nowhere as strong as at the moment of its fading, or when a sound disengages itself starkly from the dense tonal texture, indicating the passage of art into its moment of naturalness" (AT, p. 117). ["Ästhetische Transzendenz und Entzäuberung finden zum Unisono im Verstummen: in Becketts oeuvre. Daß die bedeutungsferne Sprache keine sagende ist, stiftet ihre Affinität zum Verstummen. Vielleicht ist aller Ausdruck, nächstverwandt dem Transzendentierenden, so dicht am Verstummen, wie in großer neuer Musik nichts so viel Ausdruck hat wie das Verlöschende, der aus der dichten Gestalt nackt heraustretende Ton, in dem Kunst vermöge ihrer eigenen Bewegung in ihr Naturmoment mündet" (AT, p. 123).]

<sup>74</sup> Readers only familiar with the English translation of Endgame may not remember this passage. In the English version I consulted, Hamm's line on p. 22 reads:

Hamm: (exasperated). Have you not finished? Will you never finish? (With sudden fury.) Will this never finish? (Nagg disappears into his bin, closes the lid behind him. Nell does not move. frenziedly.) My kingdom for a nightman! (He whistles. Enter Clov.) Clear away this muck! Chuck it in the sea! Clov goes to bins, halts.

While the English version makes no mention of one not being able to talk anymore, the French and German versions contain between the stage direction for Nell not to move and the line "My kingdom for a nightman!" the sentence: "Mais de quoi peuvent-ils parler, de quoi peut-on parler encore?" (p. 38); German: "Worüber können sie denn reden, worüber kann man noch reden?" (p. 19); ("What can they talk about, what can one still talk about," my translation). Adorno's remark is apparently based on this sentence that does not appear in the English text.

<sup>75</sup> "daß Sprache, selbst wo sie tendenziell zum Laut sich verkürzt, ihr semantisches Element nicht abschütteln, nicht rein mimetisch oder gestisch werden kann, etwa wie die von der Gegenständlichkeit emanzipierten Formen der Malerei die Ähnlichkeit mit Gegenständlichem nicht ganz loswerden" (NL, p. 305).

<sup>76</sup> "Anstatt zu trachten, das diskursive Element der Sprache durch den reinen Laut zu liquidieren, schafft Beckett es um ins Instrument der eigenen Absurdität, nach dem Ritual der Clowns, deren Geplapper zu Unsinn wird, indem er als Sinn sich vorträgt" (NL, p. 306).

<sup>77</sup> "Der objektive Sprachzerfall" (NL, p. 306).

<sup>78</sup> "Die Absurdität allen Sprechens ist nicht unvermittelt gegen den Realismus, sondern aus diesem entwickelt" (NL, p. 307).

CHAPTER VII  
CLOSING REMARKS

Now that we have had the opportunity in the previous chapter to examine two examples of Adorno's practical criticism, it seems plausible to combine these insights with some of the theoretical background of the earlier chapters to answer some of the questions that have arisen throughout this study. One of the most important of these questions involves summing up the concepts of negativity and mediation within the context of Adorno's work. Another important question to be answered has to do with Adorno's view of language, specifically how his demand for negativity--as exemplified by the theological bans on images and language--leads Adorno to hail so-called noncommunicative language, including music. This language concept will also allow us to theorize why Adorno's aesthetics, largely derived from musical examples to explain musical phenomena, can make the transition to literature rather easily. Another significant question concerns the charges that Adorno's efforts were bound to fail because he was unwilling to part from the tradition of Western philosophy. This last question will provide us with one last look at the heated theory versus praxis debate in the Adorno literature.

Negativity and Mediation

As we have seen, Adorno's call for negativity is directly related to his pessimism about the possibility for communication and a "livable" life in the

contemporary world. Negativity is thus an attempt to evoke understanding indirectly. Through negativity Adorno hopes that the flawed concepts and language of the world can nevertheless be counted on to bring about Erkenntnis by capturing and articulating phenomena and conditions negatively. This demand for negative communication finds its symbol in the "ban on images" (Bilderverbot) of Judaism and the concomitant "ban on language" Adorno derives from it. The venue for such negative perception is the realm of art.

Because the artist lives blinded in the damaged world, he too must abide by the ban on images and language. His production therefore must not give sanctuary to dominating language that controls objects through its power to give them names and define concepts. To avoid the pitfalls of conceptual language, the artist must always strive to utilize the most advanced means of artistic production, an effort that presumably shields him from the dangers of committed art that tries to "say" or "communicate" something, an impossibility from the blinded perspective of the artist.

By requiring that the artist use only the most advanced techniques, Adorno wants to accomplish at least two closely related objectives: insure that art uphold its distance from the flawed empirical world and also allow the artist to produce works with the potential for truth, a truth that exposes antagonisms of social reality. The first objective perhaps explains Adorno's fondness for negative and dissonant art, for such art in his view most starkly contrasts with the empirical world. Reified minds must be shocked. The other objective points out how in Adorno's demand for negativity the aesthetic and social dovetail through form, which leads to the topic of mediation.

If we combine the task of the artist--to utilize the most advanced techniques in attempting to solve formal problems--with the demand that art

articulate social truth and at the same time recall that the artist cannot magically conjure up material from a realm other than that of the empirical world, the following conclusion about mediation can be drawn: form provides for mediation between art and society. After all, what artists accomplish is a restructuring of material that occurs when it is placed in a constellation which reveals immanently and objectively its inner contradictions. But if they can only reshape the material that is already at hand, this means that artists accomplish the goal of placing material in new constellations through form--and only through form does art gain its negativity. For example, artists only render material noncommunicative through formal means. This however implies that form itself is content, as W. Martin Lüdke has argued.<sup>1</sup> That is, by separating form from the context of the empirical world the artist changes this material in content by rendering it, through form, from a general to a particular. As Lüdke writes, "Form would be characterized correspondingly (provisionally) as that which makes possible the unfolding of content (free of domination)."<sup>2</sup>

Through mediation Adorno attempts to tie together the various negativities necessary in the production and reception of art. We have pointed out that such mediation implies an indirectness in both these areas. It seems to be Adorno's view that if the artist is sufficiently preoccupied with form, then the social content of art is purer and perhaps can be true. By the same token, reception, as in the case of the modest essay, best avoids distorting the artwork if the essayist turns him/herself over completely to the objectivity of the artwork. This suspension of the subject is also accomplished by form: the essay (or the equally modest form of the aphorism, as in Minima Moralia) becomes almost the formal equivalent of the artwork. By sharing with the artwork an autonomy that results from its fragmented and unpretentious appearance, the essay becomes

formally compatible with the artwork. The essay can recognize in the like form of the artwork what the identity-thinking human observer would miss. Through form humans can produce a heuristic device that mimics a realm devoid of domination through which they can experience the appearance of reconciliation.

Adorno's aesthetics thus posits no immediacy of human experience; at best only forms can stand in immediate relationships with other forms. However, an important discovery humans can make through aesthetic criticism (and, say, essay writing) is the degree to which all perception is mediated. As Adorno puts it in Aesthetic Theory.

What is needed is an authentic mode of experience that is able to overcome the tendency to resort to false immediacy. Immediacy is gone for ever. The only form in which immediacy keeps on being valid as an aesthetic attitude is when it is tied up with universal mediation. (AT, p. 311)

To understand mediation is to recognize at least some of the manipulative attempts of the culture industry to dominate. But immediacy is not possible, not even for art, since art itself is mendacious and illusory. Its mendacity, however, is also the only hope for truth, for in the world of complete catastrophe and in light of the total blindness and liquidation of the individual, only deceptive appearance which respects the ban on images can negatively articulate what is truthlike by simulating a realm free of domination. This task demands a new type of language.

#### Language

Adorno's conception of language is directly related to the issues of mediation and negativity. One of his key concerns was to discover a model of language that struggled to resist making the object subservient to the

language-using subject. Adorno wished for harmony between subject and object, and such a harmony presupposed a language that gave neither party the upper hand. Ideally, he may have sought to escape from language altogether (or at least from the stifling effects of classifying, denotative language), for he believed that language was antagonistic toward art, but he knew there was no escape. The next best thing was to find a language that resisted domination, a poetic language that allowed the magic of the object to emerge without attempting to pin this magic down through classification, analysis, or positive definition. Adorno thus looked to the negative expression of art as a model of nondomination, since only negatively could one imply something without dominating it through direct definition. Such a language was best represented by the twelve-tone musical system of Schönberg, a system in which all tones were equidistant from the center (Adorno also called for the essay as well as his Aesthetic Theory to organize its points equidistant to the center). To accomplish negativity language also had to be dissonant, since through dissonance language could assert its distance from the empirical world. This call for dissonance perhaps explains his fondness for modernism.

Based on these demands for negativity, abstractness, and separation from the empirical world, we can actually derive an inexact ranking of art forms according to their compatibility with these criteria.<sup>4</sup> At the top of the list would be music, and within that category dissonant music. Next would probably come avant-garde painting, although Adorno mentioned painting less often than music and literature (both music and painting already have the advantage over literary art that the media are less restricted to reified and semantic-laden language). Within the area of literature, abstract lyricism would of course be valued more highly than the "realistic" novel. A problem with such a list,

however, is the great diversity within the various categories; for example, Beckett's plays, while literary forms, would be valued much more highly than "reactionary" jazz, despite the fact that jazz belongs under the heading of music.

What such a listing provides is a means to unite highly diverse art forms under criteria that can be used to evaluate them according to Adorno's objective of negative expression. Uniting art forms in this way also shows that the question we posed earlier about the transferability of Adorno's aesthetics from music to literature can be answered in the affirmative. Both music and literature are imperfect languages with varying degrees of potential for negative expression; within both media it is possible to approach (but not reach) through advanced formal dissonance a state free of domination.

That music is generally evaluated based on a performance and literature usually read also does not appear to stand in the way of combining the forms according to Adorno's evaluative aesthetics. Evidence for this is Adorno's position that music or drama could be better interpreted based on the direct reading of a score or play rather than on a performance.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, Sauerland extends Kurt Oppens's statement that Adorno's philosophy of music is more accurately a philosophy of composition to cover his entire aesthetics as a philosophy of artistic composition in general.<sup>6</sup> Music thus has some advantages over literature, but they both can do their part in the struggle to escape the domination that communicative language inflicts.

#### Representation

In Chapter IV (note 1) we briefly touched upon Terry Eagleton's statement that Adorno's theory of negativity by definition had to posit what it desired to destroy.<sup>7</sup> In a similar charge, Jean-François Lyotard has faulted Adorno for

remaining inside the philosophical system that sees art as representation.<sup>8</sup> Of course Lyotard understands that Adorno's call for negativity is a call to stay within the system of representation. Negativity allows one to suggest the undefinable through a negating form of representation that criticizes the conceptual system of language without parting from this system, a position Lyotard considers "theological" (Lyotard, p. 127).

Lyotard, claiming Adorno's theory to be a "non-Hegelian dialectics, because the totality is missing," cites from Adorno's Philosophy of Modern Music the passage: "the reconciliation of the subject and the object has been perverted into a satanic parody, into a liquidation of the subject in the objective order" and comments:

Totality is missing = there is no god to reconcile = all reconciliation can only be represented in its impossibility, parodied = it is a satanic work. You wasted your time replacing God with the devil, the prefix super--with the old sub--terranean mole, you remain in the same theological deployment. You pass from shamefaced nihilism to flaunted nihilism. Adorno's work, just as Mann's and Schönberg's, is marked by nostalgia. The devil is the nostalgia of God, impossible god, therefore possible precisely as a god. . . . We have to leave behind [the alternative of appearance]. (Lyotard, pp. 132-33)

In Lyotard's view, our advantage over Adorno (and presumably a reason why representation can now be left behind) is that the capitalism we are living in is "more energetic, more cynical, less tragic. It places everything inside representation, representation doubles itself (as in Brecht), therefore presents itself" (Lyotard, p. 128). Thus, we must move on. "It is necessary to overthrow the parameters of this Adornian equation" (Lyotard, p. 134). Lyotard thus proclaims that ". . . the representation of something which [is] 'outside' the representative space (in 'society') is already dead, dialectics' Finale" (Lyotard, p. 135). In

short, Adorno was only able to squeeze out the last bit (negatively) of an outmoded system of thought. That having been done, we must now move on.

Considering the number of positions from which Adorno's theorizing was attacked--positions as diverse as those of Lyotard, Eagleton, and the activist students of the Left who wanted "action" in the 60s instead of elitist treatises on aesthetics--one may wonder why Adorno remained so committed to the orthodox system of Western philosophy and why he believed theory to be the only way to proceed. This question has at least one direct and obvious answer: Adorno did not want to turn his back on the system because he did not believe such a turn was possible.

While one can naturally speculate about the reasons for this refusal, the often quoted opening sentence of the introduction to Negative Dialectics perhaps best combines Adorno's general pessimism with his conviction that the system could not be abandoned: "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed" (ND, p. 3).<sup>9</sup> While it may seem frustrating to readers to endure such consistently dismal appraisals of the world without being able to escape by overthrowing the system (nonviolently or violently), Adorno saw no alternative. As action became ever more futile, Adorno only intensified his attachment to theory . The consequences of this decision may be difficult to abide by, but as Adorno saw it so is the world.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Lüdke, pp. 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> Lüdke, p. 24, my translation. ["Form ware entsprechend (vorläufig) als das zu fassen, was die (herrschaftsfreie) Entfaltung von Inhalten ermöglicht."]

<sup>3</sup> ". . . die Authentizität einer Erfahrungsweise [macht sich] in keine ihr verlorene Unmittelbarkeit fest. Unmittelbarkeit des ästhetischen Verhaltens ist einzig noch eine zum universal Vermittelten" (AT, p. 325).

<sup>4</sup> About such criteria for evaluation Adorno writes: "A criterion that cannot be neglected in determining the quality or rank of a work of art is the degree to which it is articulated. As a rule, a work is the better, the greater is its degree of articulation, that is, where nothing amorphous or dead is left over and where figuration is ubiquitous" (AT, p. 272, translation modified). ["Nicht wegzudenken ist von Rang oder Qualität eines Kunstwerks das Maß seiner Artikulation. Generell dürften Kunstwerke desto mehr taugen, je artikulierter sie sind: wo nichts Totes, nichts Ungeformtes übrig ist; kein Feld, das nicht durch die Gestaltung hindurchgegangen wäre" (AT, p. 284).] This quote illustrates a need for art to make the break from the empirical world as cleanly as possible, for example, in the case of abstract, dissonant art.

<sup>5</sup> This conviction of Adorno's also provides further evidence for those who find Adorno's theory arrogant and elitist, since most people are not able to read the scores of major musical compositions.

<sup>6</sup> Kurt Oppens, "Zu den musikalischen Schriften Theodor W. Adornos," in Über Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 18; Sauerland, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> "For discourse to refer, even protestingly, is for it to become instantly complicit with what it criticizes" (Eagleton, "Aesthetics and Politics," p. 30).

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, "Adorno as the Devil," trans. Robert Hurley, Telos: A Quarterly Journal of Radical Social Theory, 19 (Spring 1974), 127-137.

<sup>9</sup> "Philosophie, die einmal überholt schien, erhält sich am Leben, weil der Augenblick ihrer Verwirklichung versäumt ward" (ND, p. 15).

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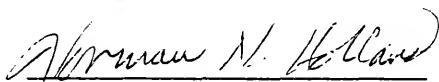
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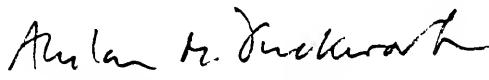
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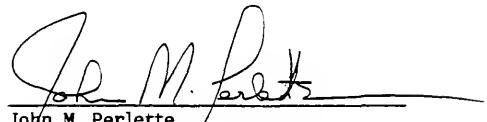
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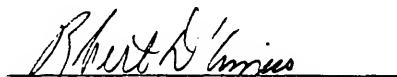
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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